Sulfur 1

FEATURING: 121 LINES FROM CANTO #84 UNPUBLISHED BY EZRA POUND ▲THE LETTERS OF EDWARD DAHLBERG AND CHARLES OLSON (THE EARLY YEARS) ▲ALCHEMICAL BLUE AND THE UNIO MENTALIS BY JAMES HILLMAN

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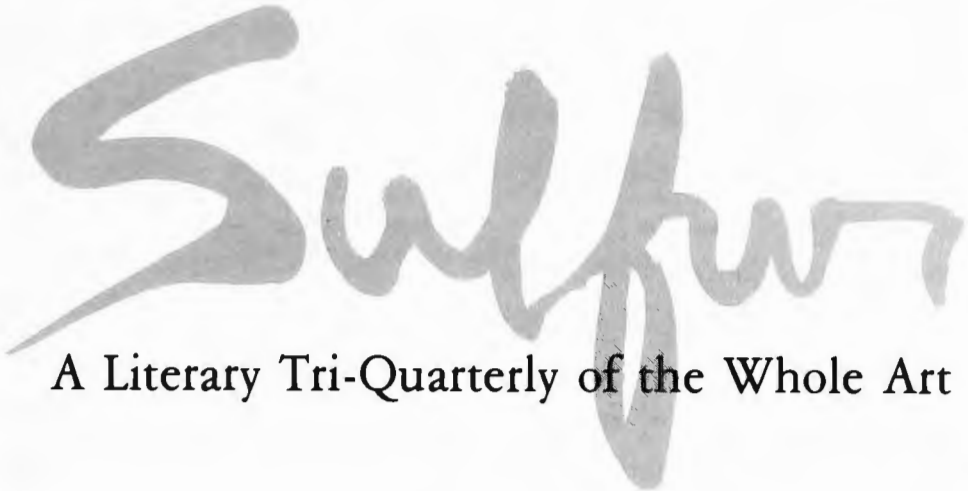

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CONTENTS

EZRA POUND: *From an Unpublished Draft of Canto LXXXIV* 4

JEROME ROTHENBERG: *Hunger* 11

GUSTAF SOBIN: *Sudden Essays on Shadows and Substance* 15

BRUCE MCCLELLAND: *[Polis]* 19

JACINTO CUA POSPOY: *Thirty Years Later: The Estados Unidos Goes to the Moon* (translated by Martin Prechtel and Nathaniel Tarn) 21

KIMBERLY LYONS: *Variations* 28

JAMES HILLMAN: *Alchemical Blue and the Unio Mentalis* 33

CHARLES STEIN: from *A Book of Confusions* 51

JOHN ASHBERY: *Untilted, White Collar Crime* 56

KARIN LESSING: *"stood here," What It Wants, Sea-Foam, September-Wings* 58

HAYDEN CARRUTH: *Who I Am* 64

THOMAS MEYER: *The Labyrinth at Crete, Fin de Siècle* 70

LYN HEJINIAN: *The Twill* 74

ROBERT KELLY: *Postcards from the Underworld* 78

ANA MENDIETA: from *Silueta Series 1980 (Earth and gunpowder); (Carved clay-bed)* 96

LYNN BEHRENDT: *Rome, Assisi, Rome* 98

The Letters of Edward Dahlberg and Charles Olson: The Early Years (1936—1948) 104

PAUL BLACKBURN: *The Term* 169

MICHAEL PALMER: *Echo* 170

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN: *The Loaded Sleeve of Hades* 182

GERRIT LANSING: *Olana* 186

MARY CAPONEGRO: Three pieces from *Microfictions* 192

JONATHAN WILLIAMS: *In Marsden Hartley's Hand* 193

DIANE WAKOSKI: *Why I Am A Poet Not A Painter* 195

JED RASULA: *Four Poems* 199

RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS: *Eclogue, Killing Me* 204

BILLIE CHERNICOFF: *Corona* 208

AIMÉ CÉSAIRE: *Batouque* (translated by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith) 212

ALAN WILLIAMSON: *Art Roman* 219

BOOK REVIEWS: Weinberger on Seidel; Davidson on the Olson/Creeley Correspondence; Wesling on Michelson and Chester; Phillips on Sobin; Meyer on Davidson; Nakell on Hickman; Smith on Wakoski 221

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instead of the private lenders
the interest wd/ accrue to the Treasury
and diminish by its amount the need of national taxes
Mr Borah was never considered a safe man
in certain quarters

verso la sera when a man ~~M/ø~~ throws a 40 ft/ shadow

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" if you can keep the peace between
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Magnanimity / magnanimity /
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Gaudier , Hulme gone in that one
Young Dolmetch and Angold in this one
and the Italians
" are not interested
in fighting foreigners
they are only interested in fighting each other "
Olga Rudge dixit , who knows 'em

and it might have been avoided if
Joe Davies had gone to Berlin instead of to Moscow

" in our time
Give to us peace .

((repeat here inrussian from the old Russian anthem
Give tous peace in our time, O Lord)

If the hoar frost grip they tent
Thou wilt give thanks when night is spente .
Italy , my Italy m my God , my Italy
Ti [illegible] abbraccio la terra santa .

Ezra Pound

From an Unpublished Draft of Canto LXXXIV

(Editor's Note: When Ezra Pound was composing the final version of the Pisan Cantos from preliminary drafts, he decided not to include most of a 123-line fragment from the end of Canto 84. Perhaps some of the lines seemed too personal or sentimental to the poet, or perhaps they didn't fit into the structure of the canto as its final form developed. In view of Pound's often stated concern for careful editing, we must conclude that he had his own good reasons for cutting the passage when the eleven Pisan Cantos were published in 1948.

The quality of the poetry, particularly the last 19 lines at the end of this, the last of the Pisan Cantos, seems to justify its appearance now as a separate fragment. Pound himself once noted that Cantos 81 & 84 are essential to understanding the whole work. The lines add to that understanding. Additional reinforcement comes from the beauty of the poetry and the growing significance of his ideas.

Despite his detention in the Disciplinary Training Center at Pisa, and the stress under which he had been living for several years, Pound persisted in his humanity, and seems to have abandoned none of his determination to realize his ideals even in a war-torn world apparently devoid of dreams. The references to his journey from Rome north to Gais, amid the chaos of Italy's capitulation, show that he witnessed the effects of war first-hand. Rather than dull his intuition of the beauty of landscape, nature and history, the punishment of the cage magnified his memory. The meaning of the "Tradition" he wrote about so often came into focus, and at that time its meaning could not have been a mere idealization. His isolation distilled key ideas. Clarity evolved from uncertainty through a logic of suffering, and his imagination drew from fact and experience as in no other work.

The line about the bees gathering honey as the soul gathers light (via Bartlett's Familiar Quotations) takes on additional meaning in the context of its source, *Les Miserables*, by Victor Hugo, another political exile.

Pound's Renaissance-style persona of poet as worldly counsellor, adept at the most sophisticated and delicate aspects of modern life, clashed with the contemporary view (from the 19th Century on, particularly in America) of poet-as-crank, Bohemian, outsider, blunderer, extremist: i.e., a person not to be taken seriously. After years of rejection in his own country, in contrast to the acceptance and respect he gained in Italy, his emotional embrace of Italy at the end of the fragment is not difficult to understand. He could do little with political leaders and critics who

← A reproduction of the last page of Pound's manuscript.

treated him as a dolt, and who had already decided on war, no matter what the cost to Europe. Even today *our* own minds are almost daily stretched to the bursting point with the enormity and continuity of the gun sales. What was treason is viewed as duty and patriotism.

Pound apparently decided to omit this fragment when he assembled the typescript of the Pisan Cantos now located at Yale's Beinecke Rare Book Library. But the lyrical couplet:

> If the hoar frost grip thy tent
> Thou wilt give thanks when night is spente.

was attached to the printed version even though it is not present in the typescript. An equally lyrical eight-line fragment beginning:

> Yet from my tomb such flames of love arise
> That whoso passes shall be warmed thereby . . .

is present in the typescript, but was not used in the final version.)

—MATTHEW JENNETT

△

Night rain and a Biddle sky
"That somewhat obstinate expression
not devoid of amusement
not devoid of amusement
on John Adams' face in his frontispiece
and that this might have to do with "funding"
funding, as in the jargon of that epoch.

"H-how old is it?
How high is it — eh
Wu-what makes it a wonder?"
La Torre di Pisa
in the dim mind of the sick-call
The "dark forest" (Turgenev) la selva . . .

or a sky as feldspar in autumn
when the sun goes to his rest

and to you Father Ascreus commen —
about the time of my birthday
2 friends, new friends:
this lady-bug not red brown but yellow
black spotted who draws in her head like a turtle
and this wasp yellow banded
aux yeux fleur-de-tête
in extacy over my jam spread
exuberant as a puppy-dog
and to *gea* the munificent my thanks for 2 excellent
mushrooms

while at the next dawn with rain
under the long line of gibbets
the lights of the penal area
as some Jersey City by Lethe
plus my apologies to Hugo, via "Bartlett":

"Bees gather honey as the soul gathers light"
Augurellus: flos collegit rerum. Nov. "
My mind stretched to the bursting point
with this enormity
with the continuity of the gun-sales
What bird cries in November after the rain?

INCIPIT VITA NUOVA:

Tea at Norah's
and then at the airport:
"what shall we do? We have no officers.

and at Sette Bagni nothing to pay for good bread —
that after Roma —
nothing to pay for that egg
or those grapes
or that double minestra
"Cosa fanno a Roma?"
Wd/ I stay for the night,
and the first day they kept their packs
and the second got rid of
all military impedimenta
in fact of *all* impedimenta
ready to escape in their underwear,
One night under the stars
one on a bench at Rieti
one on Bologna platform
after food at the cab-driver's friend's trattoria
Lo sfacelo, understood why Hem had written,
that is, his values.

So that it must be almost clear
to even the simple of heart
That if you spend ten billion
buying @ 35 dollars
instead of @ 21.60
there will be 4 billion velvet
Some of which may have gone to Mocatta
(Muscovites also selling)
though our Treasury has no official knowledge
of anyone save the last firm that had it
before the Treasury purchase

I was told "Oh, no/" and in June '39 in Greenwich Connecticut
"Oh no, they (that is Eden and Churchill)

are going to get into the government
in order to get the war started
So why stop at Standard Oil and von Schröder
on account of a minor ὡστεροπρότερου

And as reply, Stalin's:
I will believe the American.

So there was the gold an' the silver
and the needlessness of the loans

and I recalled that a certain point of the
conversation
I had said:
"Good God / you don't mean
they are worse than the other gang?
And he (Borah) replied: N-o-o
I wdn't/ say that but
I can't work with 'em.
And years later it was, at least to some
quite apparent
that if the Treasury made the loans
instead of the private lenders
the interest wd/ accrue to the Treasury
and diminish by its amount the need of national taxes
Mr Borah was never considered a safe man
in certain quarters

verso la sera when a man throws a 40 ft/ shadow

our Pisan sky making blue all the puddles
then cloud hill rises over the rock range
quadrupling it

and the S.E. is a slit of fire, 11th November
So the Old Emperor said to Shun

the emphasis is ideogrammicly on the lower component

"if you can keep the peace between
those two hell-cats
you will have no trouble in running the Empire.

Magnanimity / magnanimity /
I know I ask a great deal

Gaudier, Hulme gone in that one
Young Dolmetsch and Angold in this one
and the Italians
"are not interested
in fighting foreigners,
they are only interested in fighting each other"
Olga Rudge dixit, who knows 'em

and it might have been avoided if
Joe Davies had gone to Berlin instead of to Moscow

"in our time
Give to us peace.

If the hoar frost grip thy tent
Thou wilt give thanks when night is spente.
Italy, my Italy, my God, my Italy
Ti abbraccio la terra santa.

△

Jerome Rothenberg

Hunger

1
the prisoners, committed to death
around the world
the squadrons of hungry ghosts almost like armies
that swarm up & down the streets
always behind your house
never in front
where the bright wall tells the world
"a happy giant lives here"
I would rather run away
no more terror & no more loss of memory
promises the guard
I tell him: I don't want any part of this
even if it's a dream—& it is—
in the blood the enzymes are the same
the prisoners are all marching & won't stop
until they lay you flat
until your eye—no longer focused on the road
no longer on the sign over the supermarket
illumination—flops on your cheek
the jaw at a cockeyed angle
away from your face, the skin
peculiar, pasty like a kind of earth
loose & crumbling
what will you become & what will we all become
before the time of the big change

the miracle?
the body is a remorseless institution
it escapes me though I respect it
greatly, though I equate it with this poem
another metaphor for death
the armies of the world have no respect
for flesh
        they run their wheels
over it, they crush it to shadows
with their wheels

2

the hunger of the rich man
knows no end
the man & the woman, both insatiable
reduce the world's flesh to a sauce
& smear it over their wrists & thighs
& follow the delicious cracks of their bodies
trying to shove the substance in
a gibelotte done hunter style
the dead feet still thick with fur
the tongues torn from their cries
harbor the ghosts of tears
wild capers scrape the bourgeois flesh
the hunger of the man & woman
lords of hunger
gives a direction to their lives
they speak in French
the only language the bones understand
when they rub the femurs against each other's nipples
—hungry hungry—
when his own mouth over her cunt
feels the dead bone slip in

from his trembling fingers
this is how gods make love in graveyards
eating, sucking out their lives
the woman mother of the bones straddles
a throne of hungry beggars
hands reach up to her in death
they stroke her ribs
incite her, the man & woman
gather strength
under the shadow of an egg-beater
a new vibrator, watching
"les viandes rôties, the eloquence
"of slowly turning flesh
"contracting
"swelling
"fondled by repeated basting
"assumes a rich brown satin glaze
the hunger of the rich man
leaves him shrunken
because it doesn't end
he says "sweet momma," croons it
in the voice that made him famous
they eat each other's sex
then they eat the sex of others
they invent new hungers
hunger for power & for grass
hunger for sleep & badges
hunger for swollen sausages
hunger for swollen legs
hunger for the sounds of swollen children
hunger for omens
hunger for facades
hunger for kings

hunger for irreversible death
hunger for a monument to hunger
only the rich can still invent
they wait for future hungers
servants will spoon for them
they drive to funerals & spas
they leave crisp dollars on each other's plates
the hunger of the rich man
reaches for the moon
it breaks the world in half
& hands it
first to his bride, his love
they melt in tears
the band plays "satisfaction"
but they go on eating
"till the end of time"

Gustaf Sobin

Sudden Essays on Shadows and Substance

the shadow, within, thinks of itself as substance
while what it wishes (the other)
appears as substance, is only
its obliterating reply.

---

if the shadow points
it's because the shadow's drawn; drawn, I
call it 'you,' 'yours,'
when it's never yours but

the glint you make that pulls the shadow through . . .

. . . all one's darkness being weighed, risked
in those thin
tin- white quivers.

---

you, because
I didn't want: never asked for myself,
but slaked, each time,
on your shattered mirrors.

---

under a breeze-cloth of glances, is letting
the light bones go.

---

if word is, if
world is: it's outside what-

ever it is that wishes to name, number, elaborate.

---

is the shadow-
within-the- flesh, reflected, that permits passage; is
nothing before or beyond it; only
its 'between.'

---

through the narrows, that
draft of fumes, thickening to
a murmur, the white rhymes of its dissolution . . . . . .

---

filled the world with ourselves; then, invented a
grail, ir-

resonant enough.

---

the fingers, curling
into claws, to
withhold the rolled smoke of the shadows (as if

they could).

---

as the fanned lashes touch: the smoke
cones through.

---

on and on, one soul
ridding itself upon another: our heaven-cir-

cuitous.

---

rushed, each time, towards the
hollowest, the 'heart of lepers,' this

gift of our needlessness.

---

awash in those ashes: still talked of roses . . . . .

---

am the transparent mask that
you've made: in half-circles, the
wild ash rubbed into arms, shoulders, your
long glowing face.

---

to bury our shadows under the
lashes of
their reflection, is what we mean; murmur of . . . .

△

Bruce McClelland

[Polis]

They do not speak
or are of the *polis.*
I have walked among them,
their speech stops I ask
is it the *agora* I am toward
where the angels merchandise
the dread, to be found here,
where the race becomes.

The race of flowers names
the tip of tongue, the quantity
of lines the yield of yard
the acres of the men
who plant this field.

how quiet they grow
into nation, market,
crop hushed for terrible
knowledge of becoming.

The scythe of Vico is a rumor of
or fear of frost tonight
& the women will be dancing
around a fire
away from here

that rustles thru the
(nothing more than
bones.
They chatter, barbarian
lingo of neonony, the new
laws that affect
o, all of us. I will listen to that
if they will speak to me
in Greek of fragments
of the old laws, of the tongue,
of the rituals of the seeds
what is left of them the purpose
of the women's dance

was never to prevent the cold
from coming on in order
that it pass. My understanding
centers there, that hilltop
where they hold their fire
becomes the town, & I have
walked among.

△

Jacinto Cua Pospoy

Thirty Years Later: The Estados Unidos Goes to the Moon

from the Tzutujil Maya

—translated by Martin Prechtel and Nathaniel Tarn

QUESTIONING VOICE: You have this *Cerro de Burro* here, this hill you call the Center. Did it have anything to do with the great earthquake of 1975? Why did all the towns to the north and east get hurt and Santiago Atitlan here escape unhurt?

ANSWERING VOICE: It was because of the prophet Francisco Sojuel, the one who died from down here around 1900. In every volcano there is a guy holding down one of the four corners of the mansion. Four guys. Sojuel got restive one day and went over to see a friend by Patzun—the town that got worst hit. Well, Evil Person came out of Volcano San Bernabe and began to shake Sojuel's corner of the mansion while he was gone. So the guys at the Center, they sent a telegram to Sojuel—that he should rush back before his part of the mansion fell down on the people. He holds down the part here by Santiago. So he just got back in time: but where he went on his visit, in Patzun and Patzicia—they got hit.

QUESTIONING VOICE: Is that the *real* reason? I mean, I've heard all about the quarrels between Santiago and Patzun. Their getting the best corn in the original handout and all that. But was that the real reason? Someone told me the stars. . .

ANSWERING VOICE: O.K. Well. The real reason, of course, is because the astronauts tried to steal the stars. The guys who went up there to walk on the face of the Moon. It happened years and years ago that the people of Estados Unidos were getting greedy and running out of money. And all these people were coming on down here, you know, more and more tourists coming down here and, because of that, money was leaving the Estados Unidos and coming back to the Navel, here in Guatemala. The material wealth was coming back to its origin, here in the Center. So the Estados Unidos had to go out and steal stars. . .

QUESTIONING VOICE: But: money?. . . stars? Relationship of?

ANSWERING VOICE: The rocks inside the Center and the stars: same thing. In the Center, you get the Root of Earth, the Root of World: rocks, minerals, light, electricity, all of that comes from this root. That's what all the arsenals of the rain angels are made of: sunlight, lightning, rainbow, gunpowder, thunder: it's all one thing. The Root stays in there glowing and trembling; it's controlled by the Old Guys in there and it trembles every day.

Now that Root, that buried star: it has a corresponding pole in the sky. When Estados Unidos lost its money to us down here, their whole relationship to that pole was in trouble. So they had to go out and steal stars.

Well, there were two brothers. . .

QUESTIONING VOICE: You're kidding! ALL your stories here have two brothers!

ANSWERING VOICE: There were two brothers who were supposed to go up to the Moon and they developed a great way to jump up there. They were carrying some sort of pack on their backs: like a little house. So they got up to the Moon.

Trouble is, they didn't ask permission. They didn't make prayers

before they left: they didn't do *costumbre*. I don't know: do the *Gringos* know about *costumbre*? Anyway, they got up there and looked for the door of the Moon-Mountain, you know: all mountains have their doors. It took them a while to find the door and they knocked bam,bam,bam. Meanwhile, they saw all these stars rolling by. The younger one said, "Hey, why don't we grab some of those?" But the older guy was embarrassed, he felt embarrassed. So they decided to ask the Grandmother.

Finally, a big giant, the Grandmother's "dog," he opens this door. "What are you guys doing over here?" he says. "Oh, well, we just want to talk to Grandmother," they say. The dog goes: "Oh, no, no way: she's out visiting, she's out for the month," the dog replies. —"Well, where did she go?" the brothers ask. —"Oh you know, every month she goes visiting. She'll be back in twenty days." —"TWENTY DAYS! THAT'S TERRIBLE!!!" the guys say. —"Yes, twenty days, you guys fuck off," the dog says. And he slams the door in their faces.

Well, they didn't even have the time to ask if they could wait around. So they wandered around for twenty days hanging out and checking out the moon, but, you know, there wasn't really much of anything. Finally, the twenty days go by and they go back to the door, blam, blam, blam. The giant comes out again, same rigmarole. "Well," the guys say, "we just want to talk to the Grandmother," and they kneel down, you know, and cross themselves, and go into a long ritual speech, "We just want to come before your face, before your lips, Lady Moon, Lady Stars, we just want to come before your hands and before your feet, Woman-Lord of Moon, Woman-Lord of Stars," that's the way they carry on.

But the guardian says the Moon is sleeping. "Could you not . . . er . . . wake her up?" the guy asks, like they do when they want to make *costumbre* in a Saint's house. "WAKE HER UP!" screams the guardian, "who the hell *are* you guys anyway? You want to ruin the Universe or something?" he is shouting and the guys, you know, wincing back, thinking "holy shit," you know, "*what* do we do now?"

Anyway: they ask if they can hang around; the guardian says they will have to talk to her directly; they ask how they can talk to her directly if she's always sleeping or away, back and forth, back and forth. "How can we, what can we, I mean, what is this. . . .argh. . . .bureaucracy?" the guys are saying, but the guardian has slammed the door in their faces.

So they wait a couple of days and, finally, finally, they bang on the door again—and, this time, they can talk to her. The Grandmother comes out with long, flowing white hair and goes "Oh! Who are you? Where do you come from? What do you want?" But she didn't let them in. They wanted to go in and see what was inside the Moon but she wouldn't let them. She asks them why she had had no message that they were coming. "Well, er, we are emissaries of the Estados Unidos," they say, "and we have come to ask your permission to take back some stars. . ." —"*Stars!* Are you saying stars? No, no, no, absolutely no way," she says. —"Yes . . . er, well, we know you are Lady of these things, but, er, well, at least you know, we came to get Venus, the Evening Star." "VENUS!!!" she practically screams, "Are you crazy? Absolutely not. The ONLY thing you can have are some rocks. The only thing you can have are rocks from the surface here, you bunch of brats, anything you can get off the surface here is o.k., but watch it that you don't ruin the Universe. Stars, no way." And she slams the door in their faces.

They decide that if that's all they can get, they might as well take rocks. So they go around, looking for rocks. Well, all of a sudden, this big old star comes up right by the Moon. It was the Great Star, the Burden Carrier, it was Venus itself! So they whispered to each other, "Yeah! it's right here within our reach, let's grab it and get out of here." So they jumped out and tried to grab hold of Venus but, of course, their hands got burned: they were completely paralyzed by the electric light. So the older brother jumped down to earth for a big machine to pick up stars. But still, they could only go for tiny little stars.

They get hold of some and hold them down as much as they can

and get them right down on the Moon, but they pop right up again. They go for smaller and smaller stars. So then they see, oooooooo, a little, dinkeeeee staaaaar in the distance and they finally get it down and put it in their headcloths. They are going to put it in their headcloths but it is heavy, heavy, as heavy as the whole Moon and they can't budge it. They pull and they tug but they can't budge it. They want to take it home in their cloths like merchandise but it won't move. And with all this tugging, even Venus had moved a *little* bit. . .

Well, they get some rocks into the cloths but the rocks fall thru and their cloths are full of holes. Well, after all the tying up and sewing up to secure the rocks inside the headcloths, they finally get one teeny weeny rock and they think they had better get out of here before Grandmother finds out about Venus.

QUESTIONING VOICE: Is that like when Sojuel comes back to earth from visiting his father, the Sun, his assistant manages to bring back a tiny little Root: the Root of Corn, or of Bean, or of Tomato, but it's always very small, because of the weight?

ANSWERING VOICE: I guess so, maybe. Now, when the astronauts came down, they had to go to Guatemala first, of course. They had to come to the Center before going back to Estados Unidos. So the President received them with a big welcome. Then they realized. They thought they had been gone about twenty-four days but they had been gone for years and years. They had been thru a whole cycle of our Grandmother: twenty years. They weren't young anymore; they were tired old men. So the Government put them in big black limousines, wouldn't let anyone see them, took them to a house and asked them what treasure they had.

Well, this one Moon rock was somehow very precious here on earth. The Government didn't want the Estados Unidos to see it. So they decided to bury the rock in the Center. At the time there was a Mexican company working near the Center: they were looking for oil,

or uranium, or pyrites, no one quite knows what. Our people didn't really know what they were doing: what with all the helicopters and things pulling stuff out of the Center. They destroyed a lot of things up there but they failed to build a road: the Earth-lords didn't give them permission.

QUESTIONING VOICE: Wait. You're talking about the President, the Government, the Mexicans: who is who?

ANSWERING VOICE: It's all the same: men with mustaches and guns. It's one Government. The Government and the Government of the World are one thing. It all works from the Center.

Anyway—when they buried the rock in the Center, they sent the astronauts up in a helicopter. So these poor guys went back to Estados Unidos with just dust and crumbs. When they got back, they were punished by the Moon because they had budged Venus. They both went crazy and remain so till this day.

The great earthquake came about because they had budged Venus.

And, as for Patzun and Patzicia and those places, they got hit because they had given up their *costumbre* and so they didn't have any guardians like we here have Sojuel.

QUESTIONING VOICE: God forbid there is a quake here: I suppose they'll say that too many people are changing their religion.

ANSWERING VOICE: Oh, the old guys are saying that already! They say, "Just wait until it shakes in this place. They'll see, they'll see! They will see that they shouldn't have given up!" They are always saying that. They are all waiting for the world to end just out of spite, the old buggers.

Well, that's how it was with the earthquake.

NOTES

Cerro de Burro: a small hill complex situated just beyond the Pacific Coast rim of Lake Atitlan. A home of dead shamans and senior rain angels. Recent large tremors in the region have originated from the Coastal direction.

The *four men in the volcano* should be compared with the Four *Bacabs* of the Classic Maya. *Francisco Sojuel:* a Nativistic leader of the turn of the century, now a mythical hero whose exploits are related back to myth paradigms familiar in the Quichean area from *Popul Vuh. Evil Person:* a Devil or Satan figure of uncertain origin. The rivalry of Santiago and Patzun goes back to the origin myths of Santiago.

Moon-mountain: most holy Atiteco places are assimilated to mountains which have doors and inside which live Earth-lords and other beings.

Twenty days: the archetypal Maya divining calendar is composed of thirteen months of twenty days. "Twenty days" is: a period, a revolution, a cycle. The importance of Venus in Maya cosmology is too well known to require comment.

Roots: in myths of heroes going back to their father, the Sun, there is frequently an assistant figure who insists on going with them and learning. They are clearly being initiated. While the hero is above such things, the assistant is very materialistic and tries to grab something for future use. Compassionate beings usually give him a very small Root element from which he thereafter derives a living. The Highland Maya are great traders and there are many trade-trip overtones in this story.

The President: the President of Guatemala in this version is one who governed a short time ago. So much for the "years and years ago" at the beginning of the story.

Changing religion: a major theme of complaint among traditionalists is that, once upon a time, there was one religion. Now there are three: Traditional, New Catholic and Protestant. This will eventually lead to a "judgment" or end of a world cycle.

Grandmother: As seen in *Popul Vuh* and in contemporary Santiago myth both, Grandmother is always the main female personage rather than Mother. Mother figures are constantly elided in favor of Grandmother figures. This will be explained elsewhere in connection with the nature of the Moon.

△

Kimberly Lyons

Variations

I.
The weather confronts me like a gun
as I'm writing this washed by what?
Step out of this sour geometry
always shaping me. My facial cry.
What word is next,
feeling so articulately
dispels the gender of
mood I'm called into.
Breaking the mucus from the fabric.
I don't want to write anything untrue anymore.
Angels who realize inside me
jump over the line. Particularity as
style not hunger really.
The disentanglement of breath
occurs in each talking to. Yes,
it gets breathless in here where the jewels
get so goddamned stuck. Talk about the weather & clothing.
What did I ever confess to?
church of land
where each reader is redoubled through their past
with each version of the gesture I memorize.
Boundaries happen when Cities
convert into small rooms where
my body sleeps in its wavering.

II.
Wavering in its sleep
my body converts into small rooms
where cities happen
when boundaries are memorized.
Where each reader is redoubled
through the version of their gesture,
past church of land to confess to.

Did I ever talk about the weather & clothing?
So goddamned stuck.
The jewels get breathless in here.
Yes, the disentanglement of talking
occurs in each breath.
Angels who realize
I don't want to write anything untrue anymore
break the mood from the fabric I'm called into,
dispel the gender of feeling.

Out of this sour step
I'm washed by geometry,
as the weather
like a gun
writes me.

III.
I memorize the fabric
shaping the weather
as angels talk about geometry
as particularity,
not church of boundaries

where each gesture confronts me
like a gun.

What word dispels my wavering body?
It gets so goddamned breathless in my gender,
where clothing my body in its jewels
occurs to the reader as
disentanglement of wavering.
Yes, I confess to get
the version I memorize.

I don't want small rooms to happen
when I convert to talk
about clothes & the weather.
To write anymore
I step out of sleep's land
and dispel the mood
I'm called into.

IV.
Writing this geometry dispels
my shaping gender cry.
What feeling of breathless disentanglement
realizes the mood I'm called into?

Angels occur
in each talking to.
Step articulately
out of the weather & clothing.
When boundaries happen
inside my body,

I memorize each reader
gesture through their past

I confess to wavering
in cities where
land converts
to small rooms where
I don't want to write anything untrue anymore.

V.
To convert into jewels
this sour geometry
I memorize my gun-like cry
and confess to write
through angels
who get breathless in here.

My gender gets me so goddamned stuck.
Yes, my body is redoubled in sleep &
to talk with each reader
dispels the wavering
I'm called into.

When I write anything untrue,
small rooms convert to boundaries.
Through my past
I realize the version of the weather
I confront,
washed by cities.

VI.
Each angel converts inside me
the version of the past I memorize.
The disentanglement of gender
dispels the sour wavering
where the reader gets so goddamned stuck.
What jewels occur in talking?

I don't want their untrue cities anymore.
In here, small rooms hunger
& the land is always shaping
my next word.

VII.
Step out of the past like a gun.
Articulately dispel the wavering
shaping my next body.
With each talk
I get so washed by breath
my disentanglement of word
occurs to get so goddamned stuck.

Yes, I confess to my gender,
where each mood
converts into small rooms.
When my facial cry
happens in its hunger
I memorize weather, jewels, clothing & land.
With each reader inside me,
I realize Angels don't want
untrue boundaries anymore.

The geometry of this church of feeling.

James Hillman

Alchemical Blue and the Unio Mentalis

the soul
vanishes
the soul. vanishes. into the
shape of things
—ROBERT KELLY, "The Blue".

TRANSITIONS FROM BLACK TO WHITE sometimes go through a series of other colors,[1] notably darker blues, the blues of bruises, sobriety, puritan self-examination; the blues of slow jazz.[2] Silver's color was not only white but also blue. Ruland lists 27 kinds of blue-colored silver. Norton writes (*HM* II:45): "Silver may easily be converted into the colour of the lazulite, because . . . silver, produced by air, has a tendency to become assimilated to the color of the sky."[3] So strong is the association of blue with silver and whitening, that even when modern chemistry disputes alchemical testimony (deriving a

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A chapter from a long study "Silver and the White Earth," the first part of which appeared in *Spring 1980* and the second in *Spring 1981: An Annual of Archetypal Psychology and Jungian Thought.* A further piece and relevant to this is "Salt: An Essay in Alchemical Psychology" in *The Virgin in Myth, Literature and Society* (Joanne Stroud and Gail Thomas, eds.), forthcoming, Spring Publications, Summer 1981. Abbreviations are: *CW* : *Collected Works of C.G. Jung,* 20 volumes, Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press; Paracelsus: *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus,* 2 volumes, New Hyde Park: University Books, 1967; HM: *The Hermetic Museum . . . containing Twenty-two most celebrated Chemical Tracts (1678),* 2 volumes, London: Watkins, 1953.

blue pigment from silver treated with salt, vinegar, etc.), it assumes the alchemists had some to-us-unknown physical justification for their claim.[4] Is not the claim based rather on fantasy, a sophic silver of a whitened imagination which *knows* that blue belongs to silvering, and therefore *sees* it?

The blue transit between black and white is like that sadness which emerges from despair as it proceeds towards reflection. Reflection here comes from or takes one into a blue distance, less a concentrated act that we do than something insinuating itself upon us as a cold, isolating inhibition. This vertical withdrawal is also like an emptying out, the creation of a negative capability, or a profound listening—already an intimation of silver (*Spr.'80*, pp. 41-44, silver and sound).

These very experiences Goethe associates with blue:[5]

> . . . blue still brings a principle of darkness with it. . . . As a hue it is powerful, but it is on the negative side, and in its highest purity is, as it were, a stimulating negation . . . a kind of contradiction between excitement and repose.
>
> As the upper sky and mountains appear blue, so a blue surface seems to recede from us.
>
> . . . it draws us after it.
>
> Blue gives us an impression of cold, and thus, again, reminds us of shade. We have before spoken of its affinity with black.
>
> Rooms which are hung with pure blue, appear in some degree larger, but at the same time empty and cold.
>
> . . . objects seen through a blue glass [are] gloomy and melancholy.

Sadness is not the whole of it. A turbulent dissolution of the nigredo can also show as blue movies, blue language, *l'amour bleu*, bluebeard, blue murder, and cyanotic body. When these sorts of pornographic, perverse, ghastly, or vicious animus/anima fantasies start up,[6] we can place them within the blue transition toward the albedo. Then we will look for bits of silver in the violence. There are patterns

of self-recognition forming by means of horror and obscenity. The soul's putrefactio is generating a new anima consciousness, a new psychic grounding that must include underworld experiences of the anima itself: her deathly and perverse affinities. The dark blue of the Madonna's robe bears many shadows, and these give her depths of understanding, just as the mind made on the moon has lived with Lilith so that its thought can never be naive, never cease to strike deep toward shadows.[7] Blue protects white from innocence.

The vertical direction, as Jung reaffirms (*CW* 12, para.320), is traditionally associated with blue.[8] Ancient Greek words for blue signified the sea.[9] In Tertullian and Isadore of Seville, blue referred to both the sea and the sky,[10] much as the Greek word (*bathun*) and the Latin (*altus*) connoted high and deep by one word. The vertical dimension as hierarchy continues in our speech as blue blood for nobility, blue ribbons, and the many mythological images of 'blue Gods': Kneph in Egypt and Odin's blue wrappings,[11] Jupiter and Juno,[12] Krishna and Vishnu, Christ in his earthly ministry like that blue Christ-man seen by Hildegard of Bingen.[13]

The transit from black to white via blue[14] implies that blue always brings black with it. (Among African peoples, for instance, black includes blue;[15] whereas in the Jewish-Christian tradition blue belongs rather than white).[16] Blue bears traces of the mortificatio into the whitening. What before was the stickiness of the black, like pitch or tar, unable to be rid of, turns into the traditionally blue virtues of constancy and fidelity. The same dark events feel different. The tortured and symptomatic aspect of mortification—flaying oneself, pulverizing old structures, decapitation of the headstrong will, the rat and rot in one's personal cellar—give way to depression. As even the darkest blue is not black, so even the deepest depression is not the mortificatio which means death of soul. The mortificatio is more driven, images locked compulsively in behavior, visibility zero, psyche trapped in the inertia and extension of matter. A mortificatio is a time of symptoms. These inexplicable, utterly materialized tortures of psyche in physis are relieved, according to the procession of

colors, by a movement toward depression, which can commence as a mournful regret even over the lost symptom: "It was better when it hurt physically—now I only cry." Blue misery. So, with the appearance of blue, feeling becomes more paramount and the paramount feeling is the mournful plaint (Rimbaud[17] equates blue with vowel "O"; Kandinsky[18] with the sounds of the flute, cello, double bass and organ). These laments hint of soul, of reflecting and distancing by imaginational expression. Here we can see more why archetypal psychology has stressed depression as the via regia in soulmaking.[19] The ascetic exercises that we call "symptoms" (and their "treatments"), the guilty despairs and remorse as the nigredo decays, reduce the old ego-personality, but this necessary reduction is only preparatory to the sense of soul which appears first in the blued imagination of depression.

Let us say, blue is produced by a collaboration between Saturn and Venus. According to Giacento Gimma,[20] an eighteenth-century gemmologist, blue represents Venus, while the Goat, the Saturnian emblem of Capricorn, is blue's animal. Capricorn, you will recall, extends slowly from the depths to the heights; immense range and immense patience. Where blue brings to Venus a deeper melancholy, and to Saturn a magnanimity (another virtue of blue according to Gemma), it also slows the motion of whiteness, for it is the color of repose (Kandinsky). Thus blue is the retarding factor in the whitening. It is the element of depression, that raises deep doubts and high principles, wanting to settle things fundamentally and get them right in order to clarify them. This effect of blue on white can appear as feelings of service, labor, and disciplined observance of the rules, civil conformities like the blue cross, blue collar and blue uniforms, which figures of these feelings might carry. The effect can also appear in feelings of guilt and conscience.

There is indeed a "moral aspect of the whitening"[21]—and I think this is precisely the effect of blue. The whitening implies neither a lessening of shadow nor awareness about it. Rather, it means to me more space to carry its heights and depths, its full stature. The soul is

whiter because the shadow is out of the repressed and aired in detailed conscious ways, the way blues give shadow-depth and precision of body in oil paintings, the way one drop of bluing makes the laundry whiter. The specific shading depends on the white-black proportion: "If the black exceeds the white by one degree, it exhibits a sky-blue color."[22] The more black, the darker the blue; but even those celestial aspirations that race like a blue streak into the wild-blue yonder carry a modicum of darkness, a drop of putrefaction, a saving grace of depression in their hope. In fact, the saving grace of Mary's light blue may lie just in that 'one degree of blackness.'

△

I have myself understood the Jungian notion of blue as "the thinking function" to refer to blue's ancient association with the impersonal depths of sky and sea, the wisdom of Sophia, moral philosophy and truth. Images painted blue, says the pseudo-Dionysius, "show the hidden depth of their nature."[23] Blue is "darkness made visible."[24] This depth is a quality of mind, an invisible power that permeates all things, like air—and blue, said Alberti, in his great Renaissance work *On Painting*[25] is the color of the element of air. When the darker blues appear in analysis, I gird myself, expecting that we are now in for the highs and deeps of animus and anima, or what Jungians sometimes call "the animus of the anima." (Did you know that a "blue-stocking" meant a learned lady, that "blueism" meant "the possession or affectation of learning in a woman," and that just plain "blue" once meant "fond of literature"?)[26] These deep blues are inflations with the impersonal, the hidden. They do not feel high, but come across rather as ponderous philosophical thought, judgments about right and wrong, and the place of truth in analysis. What seems, and even is, so deep, however, is actually far off and away from matters at hand. What we are talking about "seems to recede from us" and "draws us after it" (Goethe) in

the seductive manner of the anima.

By remembering that the animus of the anima is a psychic spirit attempting to enlighten the soul by deepening or raising it into impersonal truths, I am better able to get through these analytical sessions. I realize, thanks to Goethe, that these deep blue conversations of "stimulating negation" (negative animus thoughts, negative anima judgments) have soul-searching intentions. A work of distancing and detaching (Goethe) is going on, an attempt at reflection that is still stained with the nigredo because it burrows too deep, pushes too hard, neglecting the immediate surfaces from which silver catches its light. Nonetheless, the "negatives" that so obsess reflection with dark intuitions and depressive ruminations are enlarging psychic space by emptying out the room (Goethe) of its former fixtures. As the soul tries to work its way out of darkness by means of philosophical effort, the whitening is taking place; the animus is in service of the anima. Even the negative mood and critique, my own withdrawal, that I feel during these exercises belong also to this blue way toward whitening. The nigredo ends neither with a bang nor a whimper, but passes imperceptibly into breath-soul (anima) with a sigh. It helps to remember an image from Rabbi ben Jochai told by Scholem.[27] The ascending flame is white, but right below as its very throne is a blue-black light whose nature is destructive. The blue-black flame draws stuff to it and consumes it as the whiteness flames steadily on. The destructive blue and the white belong in the same fire. As Scholem comments, by virtue of its very inhesion in the nigredo, the blue flame is able to consume the darkness it feeds upon.

The connotations that we have uncovered in this amplification indicate the importance of blue in the alchemical process. Were the white to come merely as a clearing off, something essential would be missed. Something must incorporate into the albedo a resonance of, a fidelity to, what has happened and transmit the suffering with another shading: not as grinding pain, decay, and the memory of depression, but as *value*. Value, we recall, (*Spr.'80*, pp. 35-37) belongs to the phenomenology of silver. The sense of the value of

psychic realities is not born merely from relief of black distress. The blue qualifies the white with worth in the ways we have mentioned, and especially by its introduction of moral, intellectual and divine concerns, thereby bringing to the whitened mind a capacity for *evaluating* images, devotion to them, and a sense of their truth, rather than only reflection upon their play as fantasies. It is the blue which deepens the idea of reflection beyond the single notion of mirroring, to the further notions of pondering, considering, meditating.

The colors which herald white are spoken of as Iris and the rainbow, as many flowers, and mainly as the brilliance of the peacock's tail with its multiple eyes.[28] According to Paracelsus,[29] the colors result from dryness acting on moisture. Believe it or not, there is more color in the alchemical desert than in the flood, in less emotion than in more. Drying releases the soul from personal subjectivism, and as the moisture recedes that vivacity once possessed by feeling can now pass over into imagination. Blue is singularly important here because it is the color of imagination *tout court.* I base this apodicticus not only on all we have been exploring: the blue mood which sponsors reverie, the blue sky which calls the mythic imagination to its farthest reaches, the blue of Mary who is the Western epitome of anima and her instigation of image-making, the blue rose of romance, a *pothos* which pines for the impossible contra naturam (and *pothos*, the flower, was a blue larkspur or delphinium placed on graves); I call also on Wallace Stevens' blue and Cézanne's blue as testimonies.

Blue "represents in [Stevens'] work the imagination . . . such as the romantic or the imaginative in contradistinction to the realistic."[30] And it was as well for Stevens the color of intellectual stability and "reason." "Both the intellect and imagination are blue,"[31] just as Stevens' poetry presents that combination of thought and image so successfully.[32] The appearance of blue in the coloration process indicates that span of the spectrum where thought and image begin to coalesce, images provide the medium for thoughts while reflections take an imaginative turn away from the dark and confined frustration of the nigredo and toward the wider horizon of mind. The blue in-

strument moves soul from sounding its small lament to the great breath of Kandinsky's organ, its largo, the spacious march of philosophizing that can incorporate the hurts of one's history into a tragic sense of life.

As with Stevens, so with Cézanne,[33] "When he was composing . . . only a visionary's or a poet's imaginative conception . . . could be of help to him. It was impossible for him to start out from an isolated real thing seen."[34] He based his painting on "shadow paths and contours"[35] out of which 'real things' emerged as local high points. The imaginative conception, the visionary shadow, originates and supports the real thing seen in nature. "The deepest shadow colour in Cézanne's paintings, the one which supports the composition and is most appropriate for shadows, is *blue*."[36] "Cézanne gave blue a new depth of meaning . . . by making it the foundation of his world of objects 'existing together.' For, when he used blue in this way, he transcended any special connotation which had attached to its former uses. Blue was now recognized as belonging to a deeper level of existence. It expressed the essence of things and their abiding, inherent permanence and placed them in a position of unattainable remoteness."[37]

The blue foundation is the imaginal ground which allows the eye to see imaginatively, the event as image, creating at the same time a remoteness from real things (Cézanne), from the green of the actual world (Stevens), a remoteness felt in the nostalgia which blue brings. With blue comes both the longing toward white and a sad acknowledgement that as whitening proceeds one both comes home and can't go home again.

Once the black turns blue, darkness can be penetrated (unlike the nigredo which absorbs all insights back into itself, compounding the darkness with negative introspections). The shift to blue allows air so that the nigredo can meditate itself, imagine itself, recognize that this very shadow state expresses "the essence of things and their abiding, inherent permanence." Here is imaginal consciousness affirming its ground.

Cézanne wrote: "Blue gives other colours their vibration, so one must bring a certain amount of blue into a painting."[38] From his perspective, blue would be the crucial color in the palette of the peacock because it transforms the other colors into possibilities of imagination, into psychological events, that come to life because of blue. Boehme writes, "Imagination of the great Mystery, where a wondrous essential Life is born" results from the colors.[39] The full flowering of imagination shows itself as the qualitative spread of colors so that imagining is a coloring process, and if not in literal colors, then as the qualitative differentiation of intensities and hues which is essential to the act of imagination.

When the colors shine in the peacock's tail so too do the eyes whereby they can be seen. Imaginative vision precedes the whiteness itself, otherwise the white earth cannot be perceived as the transfiguration of nature by imagination. For this new perception, the perception of colors too goes through a transubstantiation into a mystical or painterly sense of them as substances, as the complexions on the faces of light which reveal the true quality of nature, its endlessly subtle and multiple intensities. Colors shift from being phenomena of light to phenomena themselves; or, light shifts to being the presentation of color and secondary to it so that the white earth is not sheer white in the literal sense but a field of flowers,[40] a peacock's tail, a coat of many colors.

The transubstantiation announced by the peacock reverses the history of philosophy. The color visions of Newton and Locke, of Berkeley and Hume belong to the subjectivism of the nigredo and the mortification of nature. Color can now become a primary quality again, the thing itself as *phainoumenon* on display, the heart in the matter, prior to such abstractions as bulk, number, figure and motion. When color is, the world is as we see it—not merely green as naturalistic sense-perception believes, but green because of its blue shadow.[41] The world is as we see it in our dreams and poems, visions and paintings, a world that is truly a cosmos, cosmetically adorned, an aesthetic event for the senses because they have become in-

struments of imagining.

The *multi flores*, the myriad eyes in the tail, suggest that the colored vision is multiple vision. One must be able to see polychromatically, polymorphously, polytheistically before the terra alba appears. The movement from a monocentric universe to a cosmos of complex perspectives begins with blue since it "gives the other colours," as Cézanne says, "their vibration." Then the alchemical colors vanish and are replaced by a brilliant white lustre. Here one might be so dazzled by the new brilliance of mind as to take white literally, as if white meant only and literally one thing—whiteness—thereby forgetting the multiplicity which made the whiteness possible.[42] The multiplicity must already have been built into the mind as the vibrations, shadings and subtleties that are not only there in things but are there in the eyes of the mind by which things are seen as images. It is as if we enter the world without preconceptions, startled by the phenomena where everything is given and nothing taken for granted.

To experience in this manner is to recover innocence—hence the brilliant white lustre. Ruskin called it "the innocence of the eye," "a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify."[43] Attention shifts from the signification of perception to perception itself. We ask about qualities—What is there? in what way is it there? what is it doing there? (rather than how did it get there, why, and what good is it?)

△

This excursion, these images, and the figures whom we have summoned—Cézanne, Stevens, Rilke, Zola, Kandinsky, Jung, Picasso, Marc—reveal to us something of the nature of the *unio mentalis*. Jung, expanding on Dorn, considers the unio mentalis to be the union of spirit and soul (logos and psyche), i.e., freeing soul from body, its integration with spirit, prior to further union with body

(physis, physics, world, unus mundus). As a union of logos and psyche, the unio mentalis is psychology, the achievement of a psychological spirit. I am understanding the unio mentalis also as the albedo goal of the work, the activation of silver.

The nature of this achievement can be garnered from the accounts of those we have summoned. They suggest that the alchemical unio mentalis is the interpenetration of thought and image,[44] of perceived world and imaginal world, a state of mind no longer concerned with distinctions between things and thought, appearance and reality, or between the spirit that develops theory and the soul that builds fantasy. We have colored this unio mentalis 'blue,' because the blue we have been encountering transfigures appearances into imaginal realities and imagines thought itself in a new way. Blue is preparatory to and incorporated in the white, indicating that the white becomes earth, that is, fixed and real, when the eye becomes blue, that is, able to see through thoughts as imaginative forms and images as the ground of reality.

Alchemy expresses this condition as the caelum or "blue tincture" (*CW* 14, para.703) which is a heavenly firmament, the celestial substance that is the color of "ciel" (p. 478, n77) or "color of air" (paras.691-92), a quintessencia that is curiously concocted, according to Dorn, from an underworld experience (703) that is also called "wine" (681-83). We cannot now go into the psychological importance of wine nor its vernacular relationship with blue drunkenness, blue noses, and blue laws. We can, however, remember Heraclitus' saying that Dionysos and Hades are one, so that the mystery of the unio mentalis has an echo of a Dionysian mystery. Of the consciousness brought by this mystery we know what Dodds, Otto, and Kerényi have told us—nature comes alive; the God's presence permeates communal existence as a somber shadow that gives a joyous vibration to all things, or as Goethe described blue, "a kind of contradiction between excitement and repose." The unio mentalis implies a divine drunkenness[45] that does not exclude what the normal nigredo mind considers pathological. I cannot call Dionysos directly

'blue' despite the fact that his hair and eyes, in the Homeric Hymn (7.5, 15) to him, are *kyaneos.* He sees with the blue eye and to see him our eye must be colored in the same way. I can, however, connect this Lord of Souls and Wine with Kessler's summary above of Cézanne's blue: that "depth of meaning," that "deeper level of existence" which both holds the world communally as "existing together" and yet "in a position of unattainable remoteness."

When myths say Gods have blue hair or blue bodies, they have. The Gods live in a blue place of metaphor, and they are described less with naturalistic language than with poetic 'distortion.' Mythical talk must be full of hyperbole; the Gods live in the highs and deeps. To depict them rightly we need the expressionist's palette, not the impressionist's. Precisely this shift into mythical perception occurs with the unio mentalis: we now *imagine* the nature of reality, and dark-blue becomes the right color to express Dionysos' hair, because it is the natural, reasonable hue for the hair of this God in this Hymn, a most realistic depiction.

Although the caelum here, as unio mentalis and quintessence, is a late stage, it is sometimes (Paracelsus, Figulus) said to be the prerequisite for all alchemical operations whatsoever. The mind from the beginning must be based in the blue firmament, like the lazuli stone and sapphire throne of mysticism, the azure heaven of Boehme, *philos sophia.* The blue firmament is an image of cosmological reason; it is a mythical place that gives metaphorical support to metaphysical thinking. It is the presentation of metaphysics in image form.[46] These upper vaults of stone confirm the solidity of invisible thought in a mythical manner and they show the mythical foundations of thought; they allow, even command, a philosophy that reaches to just such cosmological heights and depths, the full extension and glory of imagination as philosophy, philosophy as imagination, in the terra alba of the imaginal as described by Corbin.

If the caelum must be present to begin with, then to do alchemy one must be confirmed in imaginal durabilities, transcending mere psychological perspectives and metaphorical implications. The

metaphorical twist that the adjective blue gives in the immense variety of its uses in vernacular speech, removing ordinary things from their ordinary sense, is only the beginning of the epistrophic return of all things to their imaginal ground. The mind itself must be drenched in blue, cosmological.

Alchemy begins before we enter the mine, the forge, or laboratory. It begins in the blue vault, the seas, in the mind's thinking in images, imagining ideationally, speculatively, silveredly, in words that are both images and ideas, in words that turn things into flashing ideas and ideas into little things that crawl, the blue power of the word itself, which locates this consciousness in the throat of the visuddha cakra (*Spr.'80*, p. 42f) whose dominant color is a smoky-purple-blue.

The caelum, then, is a condition of mind. Envision it as a night-sky filled with the airy bodies of the Gods, those astrological constellations which are at once beasts and geometry and which participate in all things of the world as their imaginal ground. The caelum does not of course take place in your head, in your mind, but your mind moves in the caelum, touches the constellations, the thick and hairy skull opens to let in more light, their light, making possible a new idea of order, a cosmological imagination whose thought accounts for the cosmos in the forms of images.

That we have had to go to figures like Stevens and Cézanne for more understanding of the coloring process tells us not only about the psychology of the unio mentalis; we are told also who are the alchemists in our time. The poets and painters, and the figures in us who are poets and painters, are those struggling with the continuing alchemical problem: the transubstantiation of the material perspective into soul through *ars*. Artifex now artisan. The alchemical laboratory is in their work with words[47] and paints, and psychology continues its tradition of learning from alchemy by learning from them.[48] They tell us one further thing about the white earth: if the imaginal ground is first perceived by artistic method, then the very nature of this earth must be aesthetic—the way is the goal. We come

to the white ground when our way of doing psychology is aesthetic. An aesthetic psychology, a psychology whose muse is anima is already hesitantly moving, surely moving, in that white place.

Blue Notes

1. Cf. Norton's *Ordinal* (*HM* II:38—39). "Physicians have discovered nineteen colours intermediate between white and black in urine. . . . Magnesia [a term for white] throws out a mild, pure splendour in the subtle stage of our Art; and here we behold all colours that ever were seen by the mortal eye—a hundred colours, and certainly a good many more than have been observed in urine; and in all those colours our Stone must be found in all its successive stages. In the ordering of your practical experiments, and in conceiving the different parts of the work in your own mind, you must have as many phases, or stages, as there are colours."

2. For a rich, curious phenomenology of blue, see William Gass, *On Being Blue*, Boston: Godine, 1976.

3. The assimilation of silver (white) to the color of the sky compares with this paradox from Wittgenstein: "In a picture in which a piece of white paper gets its lightness from the blue sky, the sky is lighter than the white paper. And yet in another sense blue is the darker and white the lighter colour." *Remarks on Colour*, I,2. University of California Press, 1978.

4. Cf. Dorothy Wyckoff's note to her edition of Albertus Magnus' *Book of Minerals*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1967, pp. 192—93.

5. *Goethe's Color Theory*, Rupprecht Matthei and Herb Aach, eds., New York: van Nostrand Reinhold, 1971, p. 170 (p. 310 of the Eastlake translation).

6. Cf. Gass for the weird and sexual blues, especially. On the cyanotic aspect of the blue, see Jung's remarks on Picasso's blue period (*CW* 15, para.210) which Jung compares with a Nekyia to the realm of Hades: ". . . we enter the underworld. The world of objects is death-struck, as the horrifying masterpiece of the syphilitic, tubercular, adolescent prostitute makes plain."

7. Cf. Jung, *CW* 12, para 322: "And how can man reach fulfillment if the Queen does not intercede for his black soul? She understands the darkness. . . ." This passage follows Jung's discussion of "blue."

8. Cf. J.E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, London: Routledge, 1962, p. 52.

9. Th. Thass-Thienemann, *The Interpretation of Language*, New York: Aronson, 1973, I: 307; Christopher Rowe, "Concepts of Colour and Colour Symbolism in the Ancient World" in *Color Symbolism: Six Excerpts from Eranos 41—1972*, Spring Publ., 1977; Eleanor Irwin, *Colour Terms in Greek Poetry*, Toronto: Hakkert, 1974, pp. 79—110, "*Kyaneos*".

10. Dronke, p. 67. On the (light) blue sky, see Bachelard's chapter "Le ciel bleu," in

his *L'Air et les songes*, Paris: Corti, 1943. The underworld as an airy place, and blue, appears in the Navaho cosmology. The next to the deepest (red) world is blue, inhabited by blue birds. Gladys A. Reichard, *Navaho Religion*, Bollingen-Pantheon, 1950, I:15.

11. Harold Bayley, *The Lost Language of Symbolism*, London: Benn, 1912, I;78—79. Bayley derives 'blue' from words for 'truth'—a curious example of archetypal fantasy displayed as etymology.

12. Cirlot, p. 51.

13. Dronke, p. 98 (*Scivias* II, 2). Despite its 'virtuousness' blue was not a canonical color (like violet, white, green, black). Does blue carry an indelible etymological taint? *Kyanos* cognate with Skr. *cunya* "empty, vacant, vain," *cuna-m* "absence, want"; Latin, *cavus* "hollow" (p. 100). *Caerulus* (Lat. dark-blue sky) is cognate (via Skr. *Cyama*) with dark, vanish, leave, be left (p. 99), *Livid* (Lat. blue) belongs to a group of words meaning slipping away, shrinking, vanishing, flowing (p. 98). *Blue* (Germanic) itself belongs to "a large class of color-names . . . meaning . . . marked, rubbed, smeared," stained and colored in the sense of 'discolored' (p. 73). Page numbers refer to Francis A. Wood, *Color-Names and their Congeners* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1902). Compare to these etymologies of blue this digest of Goethe's evaluation: "[blue] stands on the negative side of the polarity of colours where deprivation, shadow, darkness, weakness, cold, distance, an attraction to and affinity with alkalis are to be found." Kurt Badt, *The Art of Cézanne*, Univ. California Press, 1965, p. 59.

14. The black-white mixture in blue appears in an old British expression "blue skin" who was a "person begotten on a black woman by a white man." One of the "blue squadron" meant "a lick of the tar brush." *Dictionary of Buckish Slang, University Wit and Pickpocket Eloquence*, London: C. Chappel, 1811.

15. Dominique Zahan, "Colour Symbolism in Black Africa," in *Color Symbolism, op. cit.*, p. 56.

16. The blue/white association is not only in Marian symbolism, since blue plays an especially spiritual role in Jewish mystical and cult symbolism, cf. Gershom Scholem, "Farben und ihre Symbolik in der Judischen Ueberlieferung und Mystik," *Eranos 41—1972*, pp. 8, 9, 18—20, 29, 37.

17. Rimbaud's sonnet "Voyelles" where blue equals 'O,' Omega.

18. Will Grohmann, *Wassily Kandinsky*, N.Y.: Harry Abrams, nd.p.89.

19. "The blue-clothed" is a current Persian way of naming Sufis for which "various explanations have been given." (H. Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, Boulder: Shambala, 1978, p. 157, n121). Supposedly, blue dress is "appropriate to those who are still in the first stages of the mystic life." Dark blue clothing is worn when "the lower psyche [nigredo] has been overcome, as though one were in mourning for it."

20. G.F. Kunz, *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones*, Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1913,

p. 31, quoted from *Della storia naturale delle Gemme*, Napoli, 1730, I;131—37. A century earlier (1611) Cesare Ripa lists in his painter's dictionary (*Iconologia*) these figures who should be robed in blue: Astrology, Goodness, Poetry, Steadfastness and also Inconstancy (Picasso's blue prostitute?, or at least the shadow side of the fidelity-truth-constancy construct.)

21. M.-L. von Franz, *Aurora Consurgens*, Princeton Univ. Press, 1966, 243.

22. Dronke, p. 76.

23. Dronke, p. 66.

24. Cirlot, p. 51.

25. Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, Yale Univ. paperbound, 1966, p. 50. To an earlier mind, the 'airiness' of blue could be physically demonstrated by the fact that blue paint is a most fugitive color, fading fast because it had no native pigment, only unwieldy crushed lapis lazuli brought from the Oxus region of Central Asia. On the history and technology of blue paint, see Badt, *op. cit.*, pp. 62, 79.

26. These references can be found in T.L.O. Davies, *A Supplementary English Glossary*, London: Bell, 1881, pp. 68—69.

27. Scholem, pp. 45—7.

28. "Then take silver, well purged from all metals . . . then seal up the oil of *Luna* . . . and set it in a *Balneo* to putrefy until it show all colours, and at last come to be crystalline white." "The Bosom Book of Sir George Ripley" in *Collectanea Chemica*, London: Stuart & Watkins, 1963, p. 137. Paracelsus, I:83, "When the regimen of the fire is moderated, the matter is by degrees moved to blackness. Afterwards, when the dryness begins to act upon the humidity, various flowers of different colours simultaneously rise in the glass, just as they appear in the tail of the peacock, and such as no one has ever seen before. . . . Afterwards, those colours disappear, and the matter at length begins to grow white. . . ." Cf. Jung, *CW* 14, paras. 388, 391—92, and passim in Index, Volume 20: "peacock," *cauda pavonis*, etc.

29. *ibid.*

30. Edward Kessler, *Images of Wallace Stevens*, Rutgers Univ. Press, 1972, p. 198 (cited from Hi Simons).

31. *ibid.*, p. 203; " 'The Man with the Blue Guitar,' Stevens' most overt use of blue as symbol, is in the poet's own words a work of 'pure imagination.' The color is perhaps best characterized as a symbol for speculative thought, or simply for the mind" (p. 196).

32. "The poet, in order to fulfill himself, must accomplish a poetry that satisfies both the reason and the imagination." Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel*, N.Y.: Knopf-Vintage, 1951, p. 42.

33. "Cézanne is mentioned far more frequently in the critical prose of Stevens than is any other modern painter." James Baird, *The Dome and the Rock*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1968, p. 84. See pp. 82—93 on their likeness; although Baird emphasizes their common concern with structure, I am stressing their common regard for blue

and its implications for their imaginal view of their work.

34. Kurt Badt, The Art of Cézanne, Univ. California Press, 1965, p. 56.

35. *ibid.*, Chapter "Shadow-paths and Contours."

36. *ibid.*, p. 56. The blue of Cézanne drew particular comment from both Zola and Rilke—no mean imaginers themselves. Badt. pp. 56—58.

37. *ibid.*, p. 82.

38. *ibid.*, p. 57. Compare Kessler's remark on Stevens' blue as "that human faculty which attempts to unify the disparate colors in external nature." The Blue Rider group in Germany is another instance of a union of thinking and imagination. ". . . blue was both Kandinsky's and Marc's favorite color. . . ." "We thought up the name (Der Blaue Reiter) while sitting at a cafe table. . . . Both of us were fond of blue things, Marc of blue horses, and I of blue riders." (Kandinsky's own account, 1930) in Grohmann, *op. cit.*, p. 78. The mystical inwardness in the depiction of 'nature,' the dislike for 'green,' and the metaphysical reflection they brought to imagining all accord with the 'blue' tradition.

39. In the same passage of Boehme (*Mysterium pansophicum*, quoted by Jung, *CW* 9 i, para. 580), we find that first there comes a "bright-blue," then various other color analogies to it and then "it is like blue in green, yet each still has its brightness, and shines." The problem of Stevens, blue vs. green, is also noted by Boehme, who can see them as joined yet retaining their difference.

40. The many flowers appear in Corbin's white earth. He speaks of this "sacred botany" which gives whitened consciousness a sensuous reality and particular content (rather than a mere snow field or white light). The flowers are an appearance in our Western context of the anima as Flora, the flowering of the imagination as rooted living forms. Corbin says: "the flowers play the part of the materia prima for alchemical meditation. This means mentally reconstituting Paradise, keeping company with heavenly beings" (*Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, Princeton Univ. Press, 1977, pp. 31—32). Von Franz gives a variety of splendid passages on the many flowers (*Aurora Consurgens*, pp. 391—95, referring to Jung), which she interprets as "components of our psychic totality, the self" and "indicate a blossoming of psychic relationship" as "human relationships" (p. 395). The reduction of the flowers to "our" passes by the very material she has assembled, where she states, "In Greek alchemy flowers and blossoms are an image for spirits or souls" (p. 392). It is "the heavenly beings"—the imaginal figures—with whom the psychic relationship now occurs. We are witness to *their* blossoming and we are their gardeners.

41. Perhaps the persisting fantasy that the ancients and primitives did not know 'blue' as we do belongs to the archetypal phenomenology of paradise, of the golden age and happy savage, where blue need not be identified as a separate experience apart from 'the green world'—no remoteness, no nostalgia, no depression, no pathology. Nature and Imagination indistinguishable. For Stevens, the blue-green conflict comes out a tie. His work shows 163 mentions of each word (Kessler, *op. cit.*, p. 185).

42. Cf. *CW* 14, para. 388 for an example of forgetting the multiplicity. Jung writes: "The 'omnes colores' are frequently mentioned in the texts as indicating something like totality. They all unite in the *albedo*, which for many alchemists was the climax of the work. The first part was completed when the various components separated out from the *chaos* of the *massa confusa* were brought back again to unite in the albedo and 'all become one.' Morally this means that the original state of psychic disunity, the inner chaos of conflicting part-souls which Origen likens to herds of animals, becomes the 'vir unus,' the unified man." This interpretation identifies totality with unity, whereas totality can also mean all as all (each and every). Moreover, Jung's moral interpretation not only sees the many as "disunity" and *chaos*, but places man above animal. Jung does give, however, other passages contrary to his own view, for instance, Khunrath (para. 392): "At the hour of conjunction the blackness and the raven's head and all the colours in the world will appear. . . ."

43. Quoted from E.H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, Princeton Univ. Press (Bollingen Series), 1961, p. 296.

44. William Gass, *On Being Blue, op. cit.,* is just such an example of a philosopher working his thought in images.

45. Cf. David L. Miller, *Christs*, Pt. II, N.Y.: Seabury, 1981.

46. For one more example of image and thought combined in blue, see the "Vision of the World Clock" (*CW* 12, para. 307; *CW* 11, paras. 112ff).

47. Cf. *Spr.'80,* p. 48, n.32 on works by Severson and Kugler on the laboratory of *language* for the transformation of matter.

48. John Constable, the British landscapist, quoted this sentence as if his motto (or an alchemical motto): "The whole object and difficulty of the art (indeed of all the fine arts) is to *unite imagination with nature.*" Gombrich, *op. cit.,* p. 386.

△

Charles Stein

from: A Book of Confusions

There were very beautiful
ceremonial
bees
living
in the lawn
of the house where I lived
when a boy

when the bees made war there were also
very beautiful plants
the bees opened
that gave out a marvelous pink
froth for healing
and when the plants were closed
after battles
and the bees were asleep in the froth
the bees healed

I came back and saw the bees
asleep in the froth
and would not disturb them
but my father
did not have this feeling
toward the bees
and went to the kitchen
for a plum

to put in the froth
that he might see what would happen

The bees awoke
and began to intone
"OO-ROO-AH-KEEM"
as they gathered from out of the froth
and I was to understand
that the bees meant I must run

until the children
came to tell me
my father was now a dying man
and that I should return

and so I did, finding him an old man
with many wounds
from his battle with the bees
and little time to give me
the ancient ceremonial blessing

I knelt by his bed
and he called me "Daniel"
putting his hand on my head and handing me a drink
of golden liquid
and I wept
but could not drink.

*

only the voice on the one piano
where hearts are wind or empty great

operatic tunes in the long night
and I was awake
dead
in the bedroom
reliving those winds and my mother
awake
in the window a statue of the dead
overlooking the night
a wreath in her hair of dry leaves
wailing and wailing and she
howled back at me warning
saying my father had wept real
tears on her grave it was nothing

at the other
end of the balcony a little woman
came out from the inner
rooms of the dead with a tune
to drop for her daughter and her
old old friend came out

and I thought now I'll go in
to the rooms and lie down anything
will be better than this
great gusty opera
lie down on the great black chairs

I had the dream of my dead and awoke in a shiver
I put Machu Picchu tooth Monk up on the altar
I put a black cloth on the upper altar
I put the head of Buddha on a tray

and a tray at the foot of the mountain

I let the wrenches arrange themselves on the altar

I put the smallest crystal ball before the Buddha

I took the picture

*

What the Gourd Man said
When the Gourd Man spoke
was:

I make a space
between me and this room.

What I feel of my old sadness is
a shining blue-like
body
in my body.

I am stopped up hotel clerk.
I keep check marks in a book.
I knock over gold birds.
I kick a rock.
I quarrel with Black Sun Demon.
I pick a fight with bone white fish.
I have never kept a lover and I eat steamed stones.
I make a space between me and my hook.
I pick up my club.

I make love in the posture called "Crossing the Great
Fjords."
I make love in a little boat bound to the dock.
What I feel of my old joy is
a shining red-like body
in my body.

I reproduce myself endlessly causing
little
figures
with a club over all my shoulders
to hop about among heaped stones.

I reside in crystal.
I skirt the rim of winter weed jug.
I eat wool of milk stool.
I burn Name in leg of milk stool.

When blue light spot flashes on your keys
or in the soup
or blue light
the size of a stamp
flashes
I practice Night Hawk
I practice Panther
I practice Sludge
I practice Saw Blade
I practice Running Silk

When I came to an open space this side the Wallkill
two black horses
were lurking
by The Drum.

John Ashbery

Untilted

How tall the buildings were as I began
To live, and how high the rain that battered them!
Why, coming down them, as I often did at night,
Was a dream even before you reached the first gullies

And gave yourself over to thoughts of your own welfare.
It was the tilt of the wine in the cavalier's tilted glass
That documents so unerringly the faces and the mood in the room.
One slip would not be fatal, but then this is not a win or lose

Situation, so involved with living in the past on the ridge
Of the present, hearing its bells, breathing in its steam. . . .
And the shuttle never falters, but to draw an encouraging conclusion
From this would be considerable, too odd. Why not just

Breathe in with the courage of each day, recognizing yourself as one
Who must with difficulty get down from high places? Forget
The tourists—other people must travel too. It hurts now,
Cradled in the bend of your arm, the pure tear, doesn't it?

White Collar Crime

Now that you've done it, say OK, that's it for a while.
His fault wasn't great; it was over-eagerness; it didn't deserve
The death penalty, but it's different when it happens
In your neighborhood, on your doorstep; the dropping light spoilt
nicely his

Name-tags and leggings; all those things that belonged to him,
As it were, were thrown out overnight, onto the street.
So much for fashion. The moon decrees
That it be with us awhile to enhance the atmosphere

But in the long run serious concerns prevail, such as
What time is it and what are you going to do about that?
Gaily inventing brand-names, place-names, you were surrounded
By such abundance, yet it seems only fair to start taking in

The washing now. *There was a boy.* Yet by the time the program
Is over, it turns out there was enough time and more than enough
things
For everybody to latch on to, and that in essence it's there, the
Young people and their sweet names falling, almost too many of
these.

△

Karin Lessing

stood here
your hair
in leaves. as if

all
you'll never
know rose
to the edge. bleached,

ate
its way higher, each time,
then

dropped,
leaving its markings

only.
huge mouth, mouth
of the cave,
chasm, rock-

petalled
eye . . . would
purl, lash

the ruin-
risen

world towards you.

What It Wants

endless, the
summer sky

darkening
at the edge, the hills

ride
on long shadows

cicada's
in the oak

something, what
is it it wants

wanting
it, grows

like stone
piled onto stone,

stylite,

through
the day

that, still
glittering,

grows

Sea-Foam

to hear
again

the bird's
cry

pierce

pierce
and mend

•
leaf, a
knife,

a shadowy reef

blossom,

Mer
de Chine

•

where

sharp
and light

sails
of lobed breath

glide

•

your ridges'
blue, my

barest

news

•

even
the sun-
flower's

black
heart

reminds
me

love moves
also,

hate

•

that
from your lips

it
never
vanishes

grapes' purple, dazzling

sea-
foam

•

September-Wings

a huge, soft
fire
comes

in pyramids
of leaves

days
flaked
with swallows

that austral
tug, all

under
Cassiopea's

steep
crown

•
skies'

scallop, black
lamp

of whistling

leaves

• • • • • • • • •

not snow
        but swallows

the sudden
shining out of

things that
flock

dip to de-
ploy

taking us
somewhere

like a chime
rings on, then

quiets, the
un-

jewelled
void

•

Hayden Carruth

Who I Am

Leverpull, N.Y., Valentine's Day, 1981: *There is too much of the north in me for me to be a man who complies entirely.*

—A. BRETON

* * *

A. or B. refuses the tax or some tax with solemnity, but eats & drinks & wears & perspires taxation all day. Let them not hew down the state with axe and gunpowder, but supersede it by irresistible genius; huddle it aside as ridiculous & obsolete by their quality of being.

—R.W. EMERSON

* * *

I abhor nature. I should like to upset its plans, to thwart its progress, to halt the stars in their courses, to overturn the floating spheres of space, to destroy what serves nature and to succor all that harms it; in a word, to insult it in all its works, and I cannot succeed in doing so.

—DE SADE

* * *

Without moral philosophy people having nothing but sentiments.

—P. GOODMAN

* * *

Ancient Arabic (pre-Mohammedan) poems—Mo'allaquat—were sustained by a fixed and very complex inner metric even though they were composed and transmitted orally and their authors (who are known and historically identifiable as princes and warriors)

were unaware of any alphabet.

* * *

Love is the child of illusion and the parent of disillusion; love is consolation in desolation; it is the sole medicine against death, for it is death's brother. (Unamuno?) Illusion and disillusion, conflict and balance, symbiosis; and because love is not only inevitable but necessary, it can never be hopeful but only desperate. Ecstasy is the extension of despair, not its transcendence. Is this the case?

A new departure.

Ophelia.

* * *

I came to this place one November day.
I knew where I was all right and no mistake,
sky, earth, and everything as gray
as a plaster wedding cake
left in a bakery window, a dusty display,
long after the baker has failed and gone away . . . .

* * *

The only excuse for God is that he does not exist.

—H. BEYLE

* * *

I HAVE BEEN READING the stories of Donald Barthelme. My friend Mas'ud Zavarzadeh tells me that they are important works of transfiction, central to the emerging deconstructivist sensibility of younger artists. Such artists wish not only to convey a sense of the degeneration of post-industrial American civilization and of the human demoralization that goes with it, but to express their radical distrust of cultural conventions of all kinds by putting themselves at a distinct remove from their own writing. They refrain pointedly, i.e., with meaningful purpose, from any concern for coherence or interpretation. Reality is chaos. Let's

not kid ourselves; art cannot order it. But frankly these stories seem to me very derivative (Kafka, Ionesco, etc.) and very thin. The writer's refusal of passion or even of personal presence makes them, in effect, instant conventions, as fixed and timeless and "out there" as any fabliaux, though the preferred term now would probably be paradigms or transfictional fictions. In this case Barthelme has no right to sign the "stories" with any name but Anon. (or to collect those fat checks from the *New Yorker*).

Meanwhile nobody talks about P. Goodman's *The Empire City*, which does it all. There, culture deconstructed; yet with his presence and passion deeply ingrained.

"In contemporary America . . . the formulation of any comprehensive scheme of reality has become impossible. American reality since the late 1950s has become more and more discontinuous, inconclusive, and fictionlike in its strange and original behavior. Consequently, the structure of contemporary consciousness and the forms of recent narrative literature have changed so radically that the present seems to be more a mutation than a continuation of the past."

Maybe so. No one will deny that the *conditions* of existence have changed enormously. But reality? Reality is the *problem* of existence. And that does not change.

My quarrel with the critics—and please don't call me one of them; I am sick to death of that—is their approach to literature always from the sociocultural side, from the side of "reality." Remember Blackmur? How he thought a "language twisted and posed in its form" (I quote from memory) could make a "new reality"? I hear reverberations of that innocent arrogance throughout my life and far back behind it. The terminology may change—from Kenneth Burke, say, to Zavarzadeh—but not the approach. They will not consider the work of art as a transaction between the artist's soul and God—substitute whatever other two words you like. But that's what it is.

Yes, in one sense language *is* a code, a cultural system—

inevitably conditioned by social, economic, and other objective determinants—for exchanging mutually accepted or conventional news, attitudes, and values. But the poet does not use this code, at least not in his good poems. In them, each word is as if newly invented, its functions created and enforced by the integrated powers of the particular dynamic complex. Composition is transcendent. Language is metaphysical.

Nevertheless, to those who need mind-stretching or exposure to an intelligence fierce and fervid, those who are the thoughtless legions, Mas'ud's book, from which I have quoted the paragraph above, is to be highly recommended. *The Mythopoeic Reality: The Postwar American Nonfiction Novel*, U. of Illinois Press.

* * *

Poetry is illusion before knowledge; religion illusion after knowledge. Between poetry and religion the worldly wisdom of living plays its comedy. Every individual who does not live either poetically or religiously is a fool.

—S. KIERKEGAARD

* * *

Time goes down thudding on this kind of night.
Winter after winter after winter. An old head
rolls and rests, washing in ebb-light.
The last word it said
makes a squish on its mouth; dregs of sight
fester in its eyes. Afterward, a flight
of invisibly calling birds, gone
inland to the dark pines, and dawn
is not worth waiting for, obviously. Towers that fell
centuries ago stand shaking
and walk away with clacking breath; the bell
of the bones falls sideways making
the walls shudder. A thin root of blood prowls

from its broken sack, which goes on breaking.
Love sniffs, whines, stalks off, sits down, and howls.

* * *

Too abstract. *But I cannot be stupider than I am.* (I cannot be less human than I am.)

* * *

The lake,
frozen, is an expanse
of snow, grimed and
cratered,

and the road beside it
is littered
with the rusted-off
pieces

of these automobiles
that come apart
in mid-flight
like partridge in a

blast
of shot. Well, then—
not exactly.
Buf if you

accede
to a simile
you cannot not take
the risk of what lurks there

and take it
willingly. Ah Onondaga,
city winter lake,
soilure, the snow

so unnaturally
ugly. Ah
mind,
in your so useless toil.

* * *

Apart from the fact that there is no normal standard of health, nobody has proved that man is necessarily cheerful by nature.

— ANONYMOUS

* * *

Reading myself, old poems, their inside truth that was
(is, is!) crucial, tree stark in lightning glimpse, hidden
mostly by the storm: complexities,
modes, names, manners, words laden
with terror. What true voice? Where? Humiliated, in throes
of vacillation, roundhead to cavalier to ivy league to smartass—
never who I was. Say it plain:
death/beauty, loneliness/love, wisdom/pain,
these the simple coordinates. Was it shameful
to be insane, or so grotesque
to wrench lucidity out of nowhere? Yet my call
came a whisper, my sentence an arabesque,
my song falsetto. Put the book back on the shelf.
Gone goodness. Dear mother, dead father, what burlesque
of feeling phonied us, that made you make me hate myself?

△

Tom Meyer

The Labyrinth at Crete

a ground to dance on
Daidalos made Ariadne
at wide Knossos
and to keep the Minotaur

a house
I know by rumor only
though they say
had I seen it

words would fail
to describe
its endless
galleries

leading
room after room
onto courtyards
none

can believe men
built, whose baffled walls
have been
carved

then painted to depict

a harvest, farmers
wives and children
with pitchforks

or a field, some cows
a bull or the sea
or a young man
with light brown eyes

a cup in his hands
even the intricate ceilings
are stone and like the walls
decorated

whole schools of dolphin
further on
along the dado
emerge

from gull-wing waves
where now and then
one has riding him
a prince

in whose uplifted hand
glitters
a crown hewn
like a window

in the artificial cloud
where if
we looked we'd find
a second sea

boils up
forcing some ship
from the tumult of its waves
into haven

on an island
at dusk, it is April
and the sky
like a kingfisher's wing

seems blue, no, black
then green
and suddenly
aflame

while at its edges
smoke or shadow or both
suggest
a Nubian army

crossing a vast plain
double time
above corn bins
and jars

full of wine, or maybe oil
as nearby a basket spills
figs so ripe they ooze
and flies buzz all about

Fin de siècle

If only all I'd say did not reverberate
and lute and bow were strung again upon
a single string or better yet, none

then that hide of the bull before the world was
would once more filter
rays of the sun who slayed him

and they'd sing on glint hit instruments
their arrows landing to root where leaves came forth.
Each of their swift atoms a dove sent out

returning to my noble father's ark
brings only what simple chaff words leave
given up lawlessly to that wind

that carries his news as death to me.

△

Lyn Hejinian

The Twill

ALONG THE BANKS of streams never deformed by culture—in short, flush with the surface—the emphasis is laid. Superior mirages are seen, namely, looming in the spring over the Baltic when it has just thawed. A blanket of impressions. At some early hour, between five and eight, what had been the clear dark thickens. Songsters from their surroundings spring, obliged to interrupt. "Lifelike," with fanatic redundancy. I look at the dull floor with credulity, drawn closer, by a curious tropism, to engage its detail. Distance creates miniatures at all points on the horizon. It is impossible to be between minutes or, in the house, between rooms—as one might be jobs, or cities—on this scale of intimacy. Agate lines lead from the cul-de-sac. The individual room, morning, instance, and earnest intention are confining and one grows restless. The dream contained an adventure but was passive. Something "new" inspired by "home surroundings." There can't be an equation without intervention. We borrowed the "canoe" from the Indians. The colour is English. A full frame of water in which there are lights, cupped. Sparks arise wherever a drop of rain falls—not only the material, but also, the intelligible, sun. It is at this point that we again pick up our history, widely protracted. Long waits

for the right moment. A brightly polished window reflects its perennial fascination. Possibly we are asleep in this world and must have glass to drink from. Moist compositions: clouds. The world unsullied is prosaically factual, the pun and the rhyme devices used by realists. High above the lake, the clouds, reflected on the water's surface, are closer than the lake's bottom, five feet away. Everything is wet and shining on our modern asphalt. A daub with the accurate details of a description. Data, of which one speaks with a silly longing. We multiply impressions by going over the same ground. The practice is abecedarian. Nails, attention, wicker, "a location from which you can see more." The room reappears down its walls. "All-over" emotional states are "swamped" in the same dark, "up among the clouds." Complexity, intricacy, or any other peculiarity can compensate for the small size of an element, etc. One needs pebbles in order to hold the water together. I come up against the concrete surface of the words, staring hard, and then skim back, to remark on shorelines not merely flat. As they point out, the finny tribe careens in liquid ambient. Emerging mindfulness, moving, socially, outside. One rounds Stow Lake clockwise in an hour's rowing, each tuck sloshing. The goldfish are gobbling the bubbles, doubled at the corners of the bowl. On the surface of the desk a patch of scratches makes a pattern reminiscent of a clump of grasses, an accumulation of detail making its own mass. From the ruck of the ephemeral springs equipoise. Paper wraps rock. Shadow overleaps self. In fact, what is interesting in a dream is not the character of the dreamer it reveals but something of the nature of composition. Muscular hyperbole knocks details into shape by interruption. The space heater has been painted as many times as the room, the brand name is a lump, and clustered drips drying at the feet resemble the worn motif and variations of a classical pediment. Distances drop into the air on the theme of war, of work, of Penelope's knots. People passing across the street contribute a scale in the deceptive light. The invention of the tube allowed them to go out. A dam made the lake. Crowded by my reflections, as we reach the present, nothing has a dreamlike quality, and I am slow to "think

a thing through." Incident rays fall on the thick distance. A knot forms in the air. One's attention intersects with recognition, in a halfbox to be sure but how. Awareness includes the urge to "get" a "likeness." We are the ones to pose. On the surface an almost pure landmark, the granite hither side of one bright day. The window is nearly white as more leaves are added. The eponymous surface is its most animate record. Psychology is stiff. Isolation makes for weight. It is true, we can perceive, accurately picture, truthfully depict, the jarring harmony of things. A brio fills the trees. Forward and backward, the plant is always only leaf. The spectators are the ones in motion—my counterpart in the panorama. That is to say, one steps in medias res, with fanatic redundancy. The ruffled surface reflects the sunlight onto the soffit of the bridge. I truly see a giant foot in the water. In increments, intimacy, as details isolated with rolled paper tubes. Subplots are the inward measure. Psychology is a study of the static. I am more resident than theorist. The light from the sandy sun is cupped in a square aperture. A reflection of gulls flashes from window to window on the west side of the street. In planar steps, work undertaken becomes one's surface destiny. I foreground anything at will, with the relevant focus—hence from this chair the window pane, the Monterey pine, a set of roofs, the stretch of street, its diagonal taper, or the bay reflecting a haze on the hills. The ground cuts this cone slantwise. The sun runs through the current. It's slippery. Why should I believe these things if they can't be proved. Each one the starting point for a hundred others. The psychological is sentimental. A description is a question put to land by language. An echo, its mumbling trimmed, lacking anonymity. A throwback is one kind of cross reference. The Hooker Oak was the largest, and hence, they say, the oldest oak in Chico, forming the centerpiece of Bidwell Park, and even after it fell in a storm, its debris was left for a number of years and still held to be "magnificent." The shape of the spot on the ground is not the shape of the space between the leaves through which it falls. The shadow of one's feet is sharp. "Lifelike," but without Dopler. The children, playing car in the park, make the

sound of an engine in shifts, unmusical though humming, since their play is "realistic." The "I" is silent. Though their itinerary may be nearly infinite, we grant fixation its virtues. The phenomenal view has perceptible limits. The scenic limner is attracted by its orthography. Everywhere milieu tips. In the foreground, my grandfather and his brother had built a backless bench long ago, no more than a wooden seat, in fact, at a little distance from the house, where now the trees have grown into the view, on a knoll which then overlooked the valley. Was that an accurate picture of the future. Black no sooner inclines to blue than the eyes demand yellow. A wilderness landscape in these colors with geese and a moose catches light on a material resembling mylar and opaques the windows in back. A terse rhapsody of the frontier. A low robin crosses the glossy sky, the illusion that the wings hang from its body like the illusion of a rising sun. Sentimentality is untrue. One understands the fact without settling it. One's concentration jumps around, as when "turning over pebbles." There is still a layer of air between the dewdrop and the blade.

△

Robert Kelly

Postcards from the Underworld

—for L.K.

1

In that country there is a heap of millet
by the side of a road you have to pass

the rain does not wet it and each
passerby must nick one
and only one seed from the pile
and swallow it unchewed
disturbing as few as he can of the other grains

some of which will inevitably fall
and those that fall
slide into the human world and are born as human souls
with all the business of finding bodies
ahead of them

and he whose finger dislodged them from the heap
has them on his conscience until they in their turn
pass by the mound of millet and make their choice

Far up the road the original eater
feels an unaccountable relief
a wind springs up and parts
what he thought all along was the blue sky

and whips its veils open

and he hurries into the next country
feeling the soft spring wind on his soft throat.

2

In that country there are of course no children
and animals have to do what children do

look at us with pleading eyes
demanding the vastness of our comprehension
and ask to be listened to word by word
with respect both for the words they force out
and for the meanings they cant always
quite get into their mouths

It takes a long time to listen
but they are patient and walk beside us
or even sometimes carry us on their backs
always talking, telling the curious facts
of a landscape that seems to us preposterous

even after their explanations
make us think there's more here than meets the eye
the waterfall that is one long word
the blue-leaved trees from which numbers grow
the sandpits that are sacraments
where we, seemingly misguided by the beasts,
have to thrash around and flounder and feel

crystal by tiny crystal the touch of each thing

until we are worn smooth and quiet

and then they leave us nowhere in particular
and we look around and find nothing
then bed down for the night under some bush

and in the morning they are there again
telling and questioning

until we have disgorged everything we ever knew
and weary with forgetting come to a river

3

In that country there is a river that flows north
and happy the traveler who finds it

the reeds listen to him and whisper
how he can take them and bind them
and make a reed-raft to float north on

As he floats in the swift stream he will notice
on both banks the forms of people
he thinks he recognizes
but let him not stop to enquire
or kiss again some mouth he has already worn out
with real or imaginary caresses

even the mountains he sees should not hold his interest:
he is a man alone in a boat
and what intelligence he has
should be devoted to the physics and poetry of rivers

their names and forms and behavior

let him study water
and listen only to the personless remarks it makes
he hears at the back of his head

or let him lie on his back and look at the sky
the stars are not those he knows from nights on earth
and if any of them look familiar
let him look again

4

In that country there is a legend
that two people went hand in hand or at least
with elbows sometimes touching
down the scary stairs that lead to the frontier

Together they crossed the line and drew
wool over the eyes of the borderguard
or bribed him with beauty or poetry or blank looks

and he let them go on in
and there they are to this day
wandering in the intermittent darkness
thrilling each other with every shadow
they make out to be monster or chimera

Whereas others say they came down together
and crossed quickly to the opposite shore
where there are horrors enough

and came through the terrors and passed
still together, still hand in hand or elbow
touching or one's hand against the other's huckle,

and as they went they could be heard talking
telling each other the view from one another's eyes
which always were different:
where he saw a tiger she saw a burning furnace
and when she saw a cloud he ducked to avoid a great hand
that smote from the absolutely empty sky

with these comparisons they made each other cheer
And a third version tells that they went home together
back to the ordinary city up there
and went their separate ways
but the link between them was strong whatever the distance
and when he would see for example a burning house

he would say of his friend She is reading a book.

5

In that country there are groves of paper
where every traveler must stop and write
the story of his life up till that minute
when the first leaf flutters to his hand

the fewer the words the better
or he'll never finish—
it all has to be there, the nursemaid's pantyhose,
the lion's eyes, the meeting on the stairs,
the midnight ride to White Plains,

even the thing he did in the elevator.
The paper knows. When he writes lies
they dont take hold, the ink
slips off and falls along his leg,
a shameful stain that lasts a few days.
Only the true story stays written.

When he's finished he gets to drift the sheets
down a busy little river flowing there—
merfolk swim along and idly read them
lifting them a moment, conning, putting down.

How many years the writing takes
and nothing happens but the writing
and all the writer's heart is busy wanting!
But those wants won't write down.

6

In that country there are graves
from which voices plainly call at times
words that the pilgrims hear and understand—
nothing unclear about them

except what they mean
talking about hydrants and folios and Golgi bodies
and vintages and topgallants and germanium.
The pilgrims sigh at all that clarity
wasted on their own uncultured ears.
One of them says: Nothing
I ever did prepared me to be of use;
now the words are simple burdens

carried till they fall of their own weight

leaving me light to go on
and find my own grave somewhere
where I can lie a thousand years and babble
what no one else will understand—
private I kept myself and private I lived
and the words I mouthed then in my prime
were charged with my own meanings
textiles colors fleshes phone numbers sighs.
I knew that every word meant someone I loved or feared
and the strength of my feeling eroded
all of the word except the sounding shell

and that's what I hear now, and what I'll say.

7

In that country there is a woods
and in the woods a glade
and when the traveler stumbles into it
through the last tangle of bramble and bracken

what had seemed an empty clearing
suddenly fills with all the human beings
he carries with him in his head or heart—
every one.

The field is thronged with them, they leap or lie
or rush towards him waving their attributes
all the props and clothes they wore inside him

public intense and visible all at once.
Does he deal with them?
He passes through them
as all these years they've passed through him
endlessly cycling his poor unprivate mind.

It takes a long time
so long that some say no one has yet come forth
from that field of folk

but when he does finish knowing and lingering
he steps into the woods again
moving light and elegant, no one
inside him now but himself.

8

In that country there is a kind of butter
that makes you think it's later than it is.
They spread it not only on the crusty bread
but on the road too and the rocks
and when the pilgrim slips and slithers his way there
finally it is still only morning

no matter what he thinks.
Everywhere there are stairs going down
and when he slides down them
there is a country where there's another kind of butter
and lots more stairs
all going down.
There is never an end of going down.
After a long time the pilgrim eats some butter

tasting his fingertip behind the grease.

9

In that country there is a door
they stand before
looking to the right and to the left
the jambs are birchwood and the lintel
is oak in which a word is gouged
that means Pass under me

It is the only word in that place
and the traveler having read it once
obeys or disobeys but does not read again

10

In that country there is a woman
who leans against a door
the pilgrims come and watch her body
from various angles
watch it make contact with the wood
or stand away
watch the contours of the light
let between her body and the wood

and by these signs if they are signs
they interpret where the door goes
and when it will open to let them in

some of them wearied of this investigation
or their own interpretations
sit on the grass and watch the woman
hoping her face will teach them
by a sign even they cant mistake

they sit around the doorway and braid flowers
if there are flowers at their season
or else study the lady and her interpreters

as from time to time some pilgrim
looking no way different from the others
stands up or walks up
politely elbows past the woman and goes in

11

In that country there is a pool
where travelers fresh from dying wash their wounds

they bathe and feel renewed
and go on with their excursion
their skin healthy and intact

but the pool if you look down there
through the lucid quiet water
is full of wounds
bloody intricate and rich along the bottom
like the map of any human country

12

In that country there is a telephone
from time to time atop a wooden fence
or hung on the side of a willow tree

its purpose is uncertain
but travelers weary or benighted
sometimes pick it up and listen

they feel the familiar contours in their hand
so like a fruit you cant eat
but the phone feels strange to them here

and the feeling in their hand is stronger
than anything the phone tells them
though they listen to the comforting dial tone

and sometimes punch the buttons
and even wait for the ring to be answered
by one of those voices who answer

who speak the same maddening language
which is all you ever hear down here
you cant make out a word of it

though it all sounds just like english
spoken quickly and sincerely
in a room a little bit too far down the hall

13

In that country they have a kind of truck

that scours along the road and lifts the dead

for they have dead men too
who fall sudden under trees or in the gulleys
and no one knows who they were in life
and no one ever saw them living

and here they are dead undecaying just dead
under some bush and the pilgrims
step over them with a shudder
or crossing themselves for fear of such
a pointless sort of condition
lying there like a sign meaning nothing

so the truck carts them away
to a place where they are brought back to life
or given life maybe for the first time
and set to walk
out under the oleander and by the waterbrooks

saying no more than they did when they were dead
but looking around with their quiet eyes

14

In that country there is a stone that's always cool
popular at noon with those who must
walk their business along the unshadowed way

they rest their heads against it
and their hands
but the heat of their bodies does not harm the stone

(it stands as high as a very tall man
and is broad enough so that ten men
can cool themselves at it at once
talking about the weather)

but after that stone there's nothing more
for six days travel till you come to a ravine
cutting straight across the desert

down there you find shelter
down there you find a way to go
down there you find a boat

and it takes you after a while
to a place from which no messages come

though after several days silent naked men
trudge up the riverbank
dragging the same old black boat back.

15

In that country they drink wine
and take their time over every little thing
they read so slowly that the birds
lay their eggs and fly away before a page is turned

but how they read! they drink the word
by word and milk the sentence dry
of all its turnings
as if the text before them were a host of human lives
each with its options and its risks

each person threatening every day to turn
into other people

the wine clears their heads it seems
and leaves them free for birds and sluggish things
and the bookless young man who joins them
and takes them on a story with him
down through the valley and into the plain

and they remember nothing of what they've read
nothing but that there's always a chance

a river and a chance

16

In that country there is travel inside travel
and those who all day long keep moving
dream at night of taking cruises
out into the other islands
made entirely of weather wind and behavior

for there is no weather here
only the reliable music of each place
and the only thing that happens except themselves
is the occasional troupe of marching men
who come through singing a dactylic measure
turns inside out when the travelers pronounce it:
we have come from the Holy Land
Love is the anger that knows

since they too have a Palestine a far place

where someone strove and some still struggle
to make a temple of pure talk
and one day learn to walk away from it
and die in public on a meager hill

17

In that country there is a hoof
that comes down from the sky once in a while
and just stands there
a hoof and a slender furry shank
going up as far as they can see

they come and stand around the hoof and argue
this is Pan's foot
or this is the hoof of her cow or this
is herself's own footstep

and when the hoof is gone
disappearing sometimes in the middle of their talk
it leaves a crater filled with milk

each drinks from it or abstains
in accordance with his nature and beliefs
about the nature of the hoof

the milk tastes like any milk
somewhat sweet and flat and when
night comes it shows the moon clearly
bobbing on the pearly surface like a nervous mouth

18

In that country they have no need of flowers

but when the petals fall they cry
"It is Machine again
crying out for our attention
which is the oil we give it
look
at the red petals look at the mauve
purple-rimmed petals withering on earth

look and turn away"
There is another
part of Machine that needs them
blank sky and rootless water

air howling for any human consonant
to lick it into sense

there it is unabashed that the world wants us

but such a world it is
we hurry through it or will hurry
eyes to the ground amidst all the brightness

hungry for one dark door.

19

In that country there is a blue fire
completely blue flame
that burns low but bright
all over an immense plain

moving there you see shapes of big slow beasts
whose thoughtful talk
makes the flames rise and fall or the flames
talk them
        it is not certain

elephants and large cats
animals that might be those words
that move just past the edges of the mind
when the travelers are trying to talk

to get their descriptions in order
before they climb
up the mountains out of the weather
up to the huge cool flowering sun
unfolding sentences made of light.

20

In that country there is a wall
that works like a church
someone every morning hangs
strings of hot peppers from it
dried in the sun like old prayers

pilgrims count them as they pass
or finger them gingerly
saying:
        "This is something
         I used to know

people ate them

hung them in the sun and watched
evening imitate their color and go down

I used to eat I used to pray
but now this wall follows
wherever I go"

What is the earth that we can do this to it
like a boy with paper and a black pen?

21

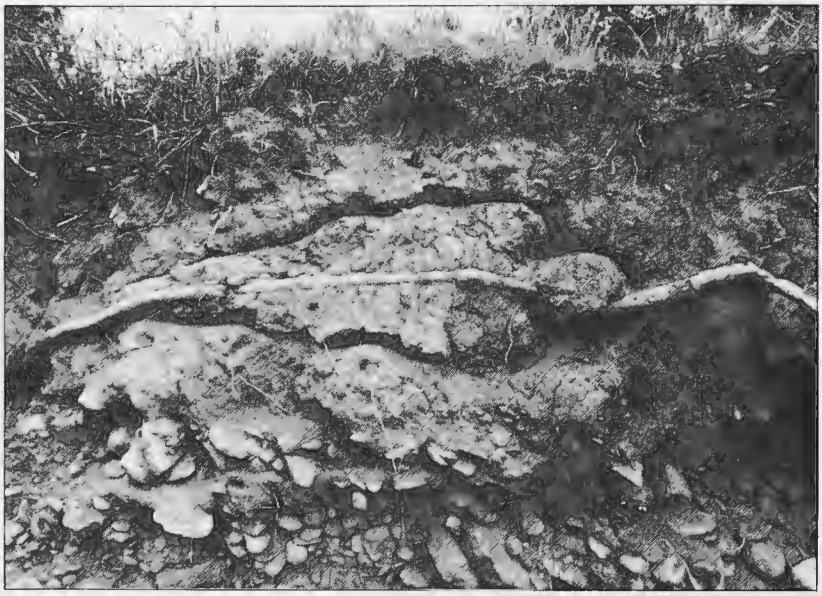
In that country there is a flowering tree
round which deep rooted tawny woody plants
prong up almost leafless
their heads

dense spiky purple
these
are cut and those who cut them
point the roots at one another
and mumble what they think are spells

they read the words subconsciously from
the petals on the big tree above them
so large they hardly notice it
and the language of that tree
focused by the sap-exuding root
casts a *walking sleep* on the victim
in which he moves and works and loves and dies
for years sometimes

then comes to himself again beneath the tree
with a sticky piece of wood in his hand.

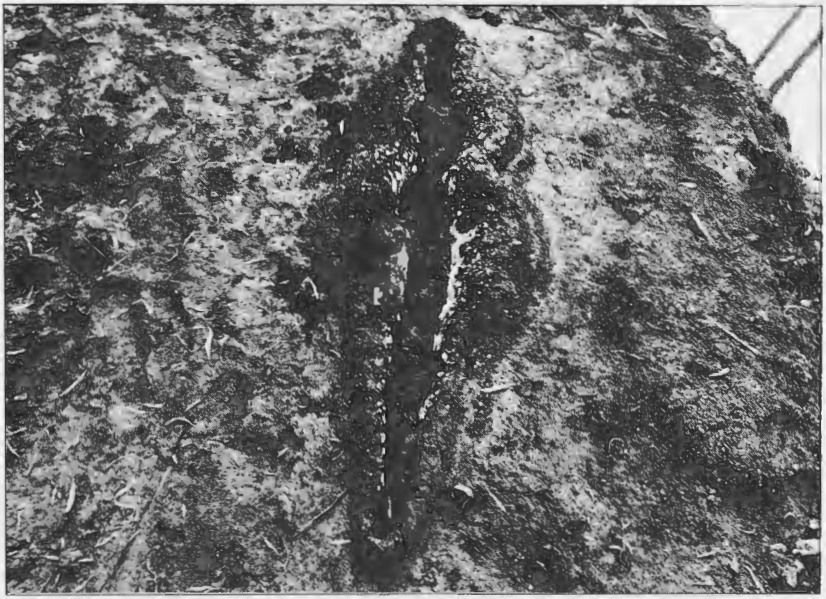
ANA MENDIETA



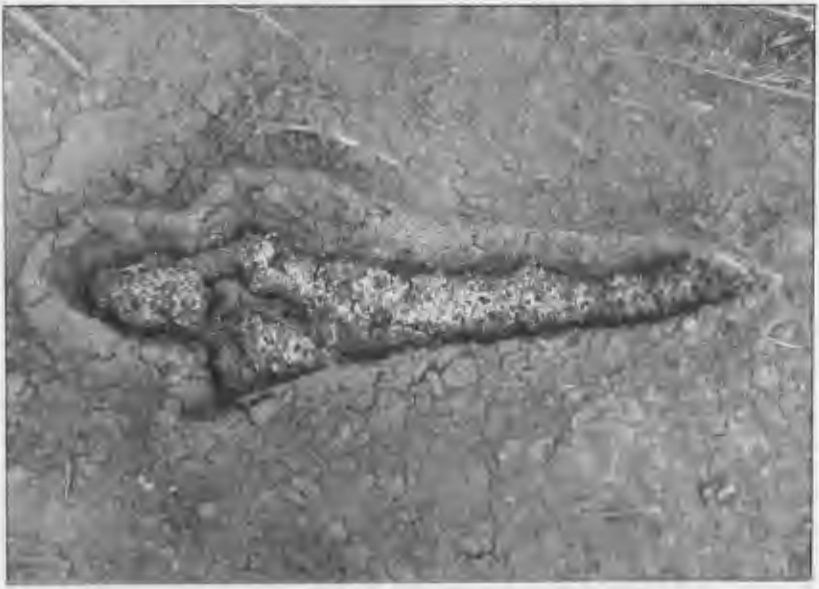
carved clay-bed

earth and gunpowder

SILUETA SERIES 1980



earth and gunpowder



earth and gunpowder

Lynn Behrendt

1. Rome

To work out is art surely
the vase turned inside out has pictures also
of men riding their horses
and women staying home to tend the fires.
Is there any way to not implode
in the center of the sun
over the hill I greet you
man come home on a horse
to the house.

I greet you and you likewise name me
following your eye prayer
every day the sun comes up again
and over that hill who knows
the other one after the other
heat's granted and taken into
where the sirens meant when they sang
Glory glory God's in the street
until Spring on one bird's wing
came closer and slightly singed
sang then and accompanied in high fervor
the making of city.

A flower still in the heart of. A simple thing
felt and said. In the bush

twelve dozen birds sing
all the notes at once.
Flat angels made that sound to me
as they cried because of so much gold
so heavy on their wings
is a thing beauty always so
worth the gold on our heads
Then down there by the river
I wanted to tell you by the river
is green with yellow bridges over

2. Assisi

The process of being born and giving that
whole heart to the cause
for which it fights ceaselessly
toward the outer rim
of justice forming a nonexcluding rightfully so
mound of dirt is a grave and
the entire parting is discussed long enough
so as to render it useless.
Remorse is a spatial process; that
undivided from head, become's one's own
face staring back through the reflection.
Wandering alone under only a sky
full of bright pearl stars
a thing that breathes is like the sun
feeling that if once, only once the heart-shaped tomb
unfurl into long banners of different nations
peeling bells and then the anthem.
Yet the world is and remains so
scarred it cannot hope to reconnect
all the torn threads of its history weave.
Weep if you will see then weep
for those who are less
in the taking force of sorrow
because they know too
which way the cloaked answer throws back

which unveiled arm, a strong lesson sturdy
cape of night the story ponders and rue
so long ago that the women
yellow clad and bending at the well for water
forget their intention and stare unconsciously
into the water thinking
"To wash free of me all this final guilt."

3. Rome

An image could be only outside for a while
moving in at dusk at you singing
a language you've never heard
surrounds you like old women
I stupidly understand again
the fever
comes a prayer with it.
To applaud the continent one comes
so ruefully from
and the pairing of the rain
whittling down to
so close
the indefinite temperature, dampness
of the table, over the hill
and past that.

Look to keep
a capacity for always seeing
beauty because is it our own inherent ugliness
we can't be compared to?
Is it to pose the pink question
of who you were
and on your first forehead
the touch of water.

A pattern inscribed on the rock
makes more stories of what we are

"The mouth of the Tiber
is somewhere down by the sea"
somewhere the birds are

after death or in the air
the names are a way of dropping stones
so you can go back
but they eat the bread
and when you get there it doesn't look the same
and the house is sweet and no longer yours
coming out of the grave past
"Surely there is more" you keep asking the gatekeeper
as he shows you the very last mosaic
a deep blue halo absurdly around the head.

△

The Letters of Edward Dahlberg and Charles Olson

Introduction: Part I

The Early Years (1936—1948)

Edited by Paul Christensen

In August, 1936, Charles Olson knocked on the door of a boarding house in the town of Rockport, a mile beyond East Gloucester, to inquire if an Edward Dahlberg were home. The message was sent upstairs, but Dahlberg was keeping to his room to avoid hearing his fellow boarders saw away at their instruments in their weekly home concert in the parlor below. He sent back the message that he was busy. Olson misunderstood and proceeded to wait at the front door until after midnight. Dahlberg was again reminded of his caller at the door, and in a fit of pity and embarrassment rushed down to greet the stranger. He was surprised to find a stalk of a man rising six feet seven inches, a twenty-six-year-old man with huge eyes and bushy eyebrows, enormous hands, with shy, intense, determined gestures. Dahlberg let him in and the two fell into a conversation about Shakespeare in which they forgot the time. Some hours later, Dahlberg let him out again and realized privately to himself he had met someone who had a good chance at greatness. In the instant, Dahlberg became a father to this hulk of potential, this handsome, scholarly, awkward figure who was the image of his own youth.

Dahlberg was ten years older than Olson, but he was already an author of some repute in the literary Left of New York and London. He had published three novels and several dozen essays, the more recent ones appearing in *Pagany, New Republic, Nation,* but most often in *New Masses.* His first novel, an autobiography of his orphan years in Kansas City and Cleveland, entitled *Bottom Dogs* (London, 1929; New York, 1930), came

out with a preface by D.H. Lawrence, in which Lawrence admitted it was the best of a sorry tradition of down-and-out literature written in bottom dog slang by a soul crushed under the heel of American society. Dahlberg needed the Lawrence preface to boost his book, but nothing could have poisoned his confidence more than this back-handed praise; it was a seed in his conscience that kept digging roots down into his imagination and reminding him he had written a testament from a hole in the ground in America. It was praise that became a lifelong attack on his worth, his identity, his ambition, until he developed an almost unreadable prose style of such brilliance and affectation that he is to be credited with having invented an American Euphuese, more gorgeous and contrived than the bric-a-brac prose of James Branch Cabell. Dahlberg's embellished prose was a hare chased by the Lawrentian fox of damning praise; he went to the far frontier of American diction and welded together his contraption of biblical, Attic, neoclassical, romantic and Yankee pastiche, a prose so shabby and glittering, so awful and intimate, so full of balderdash and sincerity, it belongs in the same anthology that would celebrate other collages of detritus, like Simon Rodia's Watts Towers, John Cage's musical surrounds, Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*, in short, the homemade worlds Kenner talks about as the 20th century's efforts to imagine a metaphysic. But all this comes later, well after the first meeting of Dahlberg and Olson.

Dahlberg's second novel was a sequel to *Bottom Dogs*, entitled *From Flushing to Calvary* (New York, 1932), and continued the saga of a mother and her son eking out a lousy life in New York. A third novel, to be called *Bitch Goddess*, never got beyond a first chapter; it was intended to fill out the trilogy and bring the reader up to date on the author's life. The next novel he did write, *Those Who Perish* (New York, 1934), was about American Jews turning their backs on their German brethren; the few moral Jews of New York who wanted to help, all die in the end in melodramatic scenes that rival the bloodbaths of Shakespeare. Death to the fascists, if you can—in other words. But the New York socialists pretty well ignored it except for short reviews in *New Outlook, New Republic* and *Survey Graphic*. It was the first anti-Nazi novel in America; it was written to shame America into action by an angry prophet. So Dahlberg was somebody to know if you were young and he had come to spend the summer in your own village. Gloucester had been Olson's summer place ever since he was a child; he

knew every inch of the ground, every neighbor. He had walked the neighborhoods as a mailman, just as his father had done in Worcester, that very small town upland that gave birth not only to Olson but to Elizabeth Bishop, and raised Frank O'Hara. So there was Olson, having been an instructor at Clark University for the past two years, who had come down to Gloucester to try swordfishing for a few weeks, just back in town again hearing that this writer, this Marxist writer at that, was here. Olson took his lanky bones to the boarding house and waited. It is tempting to imagine what he was thinking under the porchlight all those hours, hearing the music groan on through the window, wondering what to expect if Dahlberg should ever answer. This scene is emblematic of Olson throughout his long, tormented apprenticeship to writing. There was his own father whom he had to grow up under, who had died the summer before, a brave old Swede who had come up against the postal authorities like Ahab in his unsuccessful effort to unionize the mailmen of Worcester. A hard man to deal with; aloof, impenetrable at times, a stranger whom Olson tried to describe in his own published short story, "A Stocking Cap," about a young sensitive boy who goes on a fishing trip with his dad and comes back bewildered and amazed at the distance between them. Now Dahlberg let him wait behind his door; then there would come the fathers of Harvard; and after that the national patriarch, F.D.R., for whom Olson would toil and struggle until the old sun king died in office. After that? Ezra Pound, the Jonah of the American whale, pacing his days in St. Elizabeths Hospital, carrying in his head the secret of how to write poetry, which Olson would swallow morsel by morsel while he listened to Pound's tirades against the Jewish bankers and the Zionist conspiracy. And Williams, him too, although he was more an uncle of some distance and kindness, not a true father like Zeus, or Uranus, or Osiris, someone you must bring down to become your own father. Olson waited in the light of the Rockport boarding house because he somehow knew that as a young man you must wait like this, that fathers demanded it of their sons, natural or adopted. They would answer when they wanted to, and when they did, you stepped into the livingroom and talked Shakespeare all night and left woven into the blood of your senior.

Their stay in Gloucester would end soon: Olson left for Harvard to study in the newly organized American Civilization department, which was not just a new curriculum but was the first academic recognition that perhaps

America was a civilization after all, and not an old prodigal colony of England. Dahlberg picked up and left for New York City, but the two men met as often as they could; they were like brothers, if not lovers, and they shared as much of each other as was possible and reasonable. Dahlberg trekked out to Gloucester to have dinner with Olson and his mother once; Olson would sleep over in Dahlberg's New York apartment. The letters came and went as steadily as a weaver's shuttle; the men could not get close enough to each other; it almost seemed they had one mind between them in their outlook on the past and future, with the precious difference of Dahlberg's age and literary seniority over his wonderful protégé, Charles. It was like filling a cistern to teach this brilliant young man who had not written anything yet, and who wanted to write more than live. Olson had tried other pursuits, but as he wrote years later, in the *Maximus* poems, it was the simple, basic things which were difficult to master, like swordfishing, which he had unhappily applied himself to learn for five grueling weeks that summer of 1936 off Cape Ann:

> I have had to learn the simplest things
> last. Which made for difficulties.
> Even at sea I was slow, to get the hand out, or to cross
> a wet deck.
> The sea was not, finally, my trade.
> But even my trade, at it, I stood estranged
> from that which was most familiar.
>
> ('Maximus, to himself')

In his zeal to make Charles learn well, Dahlberg offered him a lesson in the pain of writing; one must suffer long before a single word of durability could be secreted from the writer's skin onto the page, where it was to be placed as if forever. Charles wanted to be a geyser and go off in torrents like "when Yellowstone kicks up / a fuss," and "get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs, the acts, the split second acts, the whole business, keep it moving as fast as you can, . . . one perception must must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER!" as he declared in "Projective Verse," 1950. But for the moment, one must smile and go slowly, and rewrite until you wore a hole in the paper polishing a single particle of a sentence until it became as durable as

Dahlberg insisted it must be. While many things changed for both men, from friendship to their most fundamental beliefs, Dahlberg never budged on the point that to write one held the book of the ancient world in your left hand and with your right you proceeded to say things that would last longer, if you only could. And Dahlberg could not be moved; to question his authority on a matter of syntax, diction, nuance was to bring back a remark as smart as a rifle report. You do not trespass on a man's earnest judgments; you bend your branches while you can to a breath of wisdom. Dahlberg hated his father; he had no particular model of a parent to go on except the complicated and ambiguous instance of his own mother, the famous lady barber of Kansas City and New York, whom he worked all his writing life to capture on paper, and who evaded his passion to fix in words like a delicate butterfly. So he took the example of what a sage might do with his disciple and simply punished him into obedience, and held back praise as long as he could before exploding into passionate congratulations. After all, he knew it was a genius he was teaching, and not the lumpen clay of the world. Genius is wary, slippery, furtive as the fox in a trap. You had to keep your eye on it and be severe as often as possible; fear would outlast sympathy by far. These were trying times for both men; their friendship was as close as either man would have in his whole lifetime.

Dalhberg's pupil flourished at Harvard; he became a tutor on the staff of Winthrop House; he busily tracked down Melville's scattered library with a persistence and intelligence that could only make Dahlberg swoon with satisfaction. He was diligently making a little literary history as he went about his student duties and his filial duties to Dahlberg. Olson was lucky; he talked his way into the Metcalf household and became almost a son to Melville's own granddaughter; she led him to the remains of Melville's books and among the texts was the master's own heavily annotated copy of Shakespeare, where he found him plotting his strategies for making the characters of *Moby-Dick*. What could be more to the point of Dahlberg's own visions of necessity than to find in an American classic a line of dependence back to something tried by posterity, like Shakespeare? Olson ripped off a paper for F.O. Matthiessen's course on the American Renaissance and gave the results to Dahlberg, who read it over with brutal scrutiny. Olson began rewriting phrase by phrase, putting together mosaic-fashion the sounds and signs of a durable text under Dahlberg's imperious

tutelage. Meanwhile, Dahlberg was out in the political arena of literature dealing with Dorothy Norman to start up a new journal to be called *Twice a Year*, which would feature the best that could be said in the Western world. Olson was rewriting his little essay "Lear and Moby-Dick" so that Dahlberg could publish this proof of the classical backgrounds of American literature in the premier issue. It sealed a covenant between them to have Dahlberg bring Olson up out of the depths and publish him to the world. Nothing in America could matter more to a writer than to be hoisted up from oblivion and be given a chance to be read. Money was nothing to the ritual of published initiation. It was 1938 when the issue came out; it stirred no controversy, only an argument between Dahlberg and Norman over payment for an article Ford Maddox Ford had written; she welched on the contract and so Dahlberg resigned, his honor intact. But the thing was accomplished, and the grubbing of literature stood apart from the satisfaction of publishing good work. One simply moves on among the money-less adventures of the publishing world, leaving behind the texts which alone endure.

Neither man could know that the tragedy of their broken friendship had already been laid in these first years of blissful camaraderie and adhesiveness. It refuted everything one said about America's universal desolation to have this precious brotherhood of two writers; Tennessee Williams would write with casual assurance that all human beings were born into solitary confinement, in his blunt preface to *The Glass Menagerie*, but Dahlberg and Olson had broken through to each other's cell and now revelled in a profound affection. It strengthened both men; it made both friends so confident in their mutual support that they swiftly undertook directions of mind that were unwittingly opposite and irreconcilable. So much for American brotherhood. While Olson explored the pressures and subtle determinants of an American civilization, which increasingly fascinated him, Dahlberg was writing a little book of essays which precisely cut away at whatever affection he had for this culture or, for that matter, the age itself in which America had come into existence. It is an ironic fact that America should have been discovered in the throes of the great Italian Renaissance, the high mark of Western Europe's own cultural history, and so spawn a curious orphan of itself that would grow up swarthy, cruel, dull, a greedy bastard of an offspring that would wipe out all the glories of another continent, and reign supreme in an Age of Iron. Gentle Athens had once

reigned supreme in the philosophical sunlight of an Age of Wood, but that was of the immemorial past which a thug-culture like America sought to obliterate. Dahlberg could not help but pick at the scab of his own wounded youth, which he had tried to heal in two autobiographical novels; but the dismissal of his life by this massive gray culture was too much for him to bear. He would continue to memorialize his pained youth and adulthood for as long as he could move his pen; nothing could satisfy his need to complain to and accuse America of its neglect of a sensitive spirit. Not even Proust had examined the details of his life with such fervor, with such a burning purpose in his soul to make every American weep with him over the cultural desert of a giant nation that had no civilization, only the barbarous skyscrapers of bankers and the filthy factories for bottom dogs to labor in. And orphan asylums scattered everywhere to absorb the abandoned sons of their desperate mothers and loutish absconded fathers. But it was not enough to write autobiography that moved no one with its pathos and stink. It was a more accurate strategy to go to the heart of American culture and find in its spiritual testaments the origins of America's brutality and unmolded character. Just retribution by a man of prophecy could only be achieved by the most careful re-examination of the very writers whom the literary establishment and the academy deemed essential, classical, and his job over the next years would be to show how just was his hatred for these false idols of the literary temple.

It was an extraordinary circumstance to find two such men paired together in a bond of very deep friendship working diligently with their great energies toward visions that would only part them. It made a myth of its own, in which brothers of the literary spirit in America should be driven apart in the very thing that had bought them together: their pursuit of America's essence and character. Dahlberg's group of essays appeared in 1941 entitled *Do These Bones Live*, the dry bones of the valley of American death, and the lord had no answer for this bitter prophet. But in 1939, Olson was just finishing up his course work for a doctorate and rather bluffly applied for a Guggenheim Fellowship to write a book about Melville. To his and Dahlberg's astonishment, he got it. He planned to rework his Master's thesis, "Herman Melville, Prose Writer and Poetic Thinker," which he wrote in 1933 for Wesleyan University. He repaired to his mother's house in Gloucester and proceeded to write a book of visions about Melville and

America. Olson later claimed that the poet's ear was unique as a repository of the sounds of the world. The ear had its own mind and memory, and the poet wrote from his store of such sounds. By all accounts, the draft he wrote in 1939–1940 of his Melville book proves he was a good poet; he had memorized Dahlberg perfectly; it sounded exactly like the mentor's style, with a few blemishes of originality here and there. It was a Dahlberg in caricature, too stilted and jerky, and terribly terribly recondite with biblical allusion. Melville was deep in the background of these sonorous arias in the Dahlberg pitch. Dahlberg read the finished manuscript very carefully and pronounced it a failure. It was exactly what he feared it might be, a thoughtless homage that could do Olson no good. If he came down on his protégé roughly, it was only to clear his head of such apish affection and set him off on the right road again, to a style of his own. But little did Dahlberg realize that with such punitive reprimands as he must have received from his mentor, Olson would go much further in his thought than Dahlberg ever intended him to: he decided to quit writing. He was not ready for it. He told Dahlberg this to his face in New York: that he could no longer work under his direction, that he sounded too much like him, and that he was going off on his own and wanted nothing more of his tutelage. Orphans are not supposed to renounce their spiritual foster parents; homage was one thing, respect was another. It occurred to Dahlberg that in his own life he had never been befriended thus nor given the opportunity to renounce the hand that had been proffered to him. It seemed to him so profligate a gesture, to come to a friend's house and announce the relationship was now to be on a new footing, one much less secure and close, that he could not stomach it. Things could not evolve in such a fashion that his protégé could summarily advise him of certain changes between them effective immediately. It was America speaking through his dear companion; the spirit of the continent and the culture had grabbed the tongue of this young poet/scholar and made him say awful and resentful things. There would be no new footing; it was *over*, the proud and smitten Dahlberg said, in letter after letter, now all lost. Perhaps what gnawed at him the most was the suspicion that he had brought about the breach himself, in something or everything he had said to Olson. It is always at the back of a lonely man's mind that he is made lonely by his own devising, which only makes him more miserable and lonely. Dahlberg could only pester his conscience with such thoughts, and with the

greatest pain and reluctance came to accept Olson's new terms of friendship. Olson himself felt blameless in these negotiations; he was fighting for his writing life, and he now realized how far Dahlberg's voice had penetrated his mind; it was inextricable from his own. It was a terrifying situation for a writer who had too much devoured the master and could not speak in his own tongue. He wanted to go away, and New York was the perfect city in which to do it: big enough for two old friends who had redefined their relationship. Olson was so turned around in his thought that he never would finish a dissertation: the beautiful scheme of writing a book on a Guggenheim while at the same time finishing up a dissertation for his doctorate vanished in his sudden crisis of confidence. He went into politics, instead. It was an exciting decision to make; he made it on Valentine's Day, 1941, and recalled the event this way:

> With a leap (she said it was an arabesque
> I made, on the porch, the night of the
> St. Valentine Day's storm, into the snow.
> Nor did she fail of course to make the point
> what a sight I was the size I am all over the storm
> trying to be graceful Or was it? She hadn't seen me
> in 19 years . . .
>
> Where it says excessively rough moraine,
> I count such shapes this evening in the universe
> I run back home out of the new moon
> makes fun of me in each puddle on the road. . . .
>
> ("Letter No. 41 [broken off)," *Maximus IV, V, VI*)

But five years of politics during the war can grind a man down to powder, even if you are suited to the work, as Olson was. Everything the man ever wrote was cast in the lofty rhythms of oratory, the poems, the letters, the critical prose: it can all be put over a p.a. system and sound like God announcing judgment day. It was a wonderful gift, and Olson's recordings will confirm it: he sounds like a trained actor with a rich New England baritone; and he had the minimal requisite of leadership in America to excess: he was tall. Four months after arriving, he was publicity director for the A.C.L.U.; that fall he was chief of the Foreign Language Information Service for the Common Council for American Unity. The war had started, and

he was married now; the Office of War Information was a clearing house of domestic and foreign propaganda which hired the available intellectuals and gave them shelter from combat. Olson joined and became the Associate Chief of the Foreign Language Division, which was supposed to protect ethnic minorities from adverse propaganda. They too fought in the war. He collaborated with Ben Shahn on a government-sponsored pamphlet entitled *Spanish Speaking Americans in the War* (1943). But what an irony for a poet in America to have to protect a world of ethnic minorities at home when the country was at war with half a dozen of the nations they had come from? Olson pushed too hard and finally resigned in protest. Like his old friend Dahlberg, Olson was a declared enemy of fascism, and he saw it coming in the United States. He wrote his first political piece for *Survey Graphic* in 1944, "Americans vs. the fascist," and it is well written, stately in tone, even passionate in its urgency. In 1944, he was a respected party man; Roosevelt himself wanted him on as the director of the Foreign Nationalities Division of the Democratic National Committee. But the convention was dirty, and the appointment of Harry Truman as running mate was a disillusioning experience for a young New Dealer still under the spell of Roosevelt. Besides, the rise of Truman could mean only one thing: liberalism was dead in America, and already the anti-New Dealers were swarming into office and getting ready to dismantle the Rooseveltian welfare state. Liberalism would arise and make feeble effort to spread itself once more, but in the strictest historical terms, liberalism was gone forever and only splinters of its original philosophy survived. The grand old tradition of Jeffersonianism was finished; Roosevelt had had the unhappy role of being its last great apostle. After him, *le déluge*. The arts would go berserk. The Beats would Howl in California; the Confessionalists would bleed in New England; the intellectuals would abuse the word alienation and chew it like a bone in hundreds of pseudo-sociological tracts and "studies." The returning veterans wanted no more deals, they wanted work and a free enterprise system in which to rise like a generation of Silas Laphams. Consciousness II. The grim fifties were heralded in ahead of time with the publication of Friedrich von Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*, which discredited the New Deal as nothing else could: its premise was that any form of central planning would spawn an ism that was the enemy of freedom: Naziism, Communism, Totalitarianism, New Dealism. Olson could not remove himself quickly

enough from the halls of a government that had swung round and now plunged into a new era of corporate-governmental collusion. He went to Key West, Florida, to Elizabeth Bishop's home to rest up, alone out on a spit of land that roamed out into the Gulf of Mexico and seemed a broken arm that had once clutched another spit, Cabo Catoche, stretching out from the Yucatan Peninsula. Warm green waters of the Carribbean, the salt air, the odor of older, unwestern forms of life with their ruins keeping secret perfect orders of civilization. Six years later he would be roaming the opposite shore looking for Mayan relics and artifacts. But now he wrote down his little testament of self-will, and said:

> Take, then, my answer:
> there is a tide in a man
> moves him to his moon and
> though it drop him back
> he works through ebb to mount
> the run again and swell
> to be tumescent I

Which moon? Why, the full moon that had made fun of him in every puddle as he ran back home from his aunt's house in Gloucester five years before, after telling her he was going to New York to try politics. That moon. But,

> The affairs of men remain a chief concern

But he will not buck horns with petty officials and stay with the "fatal male small span" of his father's frustrated life. No, he has come

> Full circle: an end to romans, hippocrats and christians
> There! is a tide in the affairs of men to discern.
>
> ("The K")

To discern, but only as an artist. He came down from his mountain and spoke in the voice of Yeats ("This Is Yeats Speaking") to defend his newfound father, Ezra Pound, who was being sped through a kangaroo court in order to get him safely into a prison or asylum. He landed in St. Elizabeths, the dingy, dirty mental dungeon run by the United States Senate. Olson moved into a tiny studio next to a statuary works in northeast Washington,

on a hill that looked down over the city to the Anacostia River, on the banks of which the long gray wards of St. Elizabeths stretched forlornly. In Key West he had decided he was now an artist; so he took out the old drafts of his Melville-Dahlbergian book and salvaged what he could from it; which was actually quite a few pages. He needed some base from which to launch a new book. It wrote itself over a five-month period, going off like Yellowstone kicking up a fuss. But if he had his own voice in this draft, he surely had kept as much of the technique of cut-and-paste, mosaic prose as he had acquired from Dahlberg. The master lived in his veins. He finished the draft (except for a brief chapter) on the day the Atom Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, declaring his artistic worth on the very day Truman threw down his own ace. His title was *Call Me Ishmael*; like Dahlberg, he now felt himself alone in America, an Ishmael among the corporate empires. And he wrote a book about an Ishmael who saw in Ahab and his ship the *Pequod* the allegory of leadership and corporate government seeking to bring down the whole of nature to turn it into commoditized possession. The ship and the captain went down smashed, and only Ishmael survived, clutching the wooden coffin of his dead friend. Olson was the Ishmael of this age, but instead of merely reporting the stages of a disaster as Melville's narrator had done, he would watch the decline of this America as he looked for a new faith for the survivors to believe in. That was his esthetic ambition for the rest of his life: to take the best that had been thought in the West and somehow recombine it into a useable metaphysic, not only for art but for living as well. He lugged the manuscript down to St. Elizabeths and gave it to Pound to read. Unlike Dahlberg, he took what was proffered and blessed it as is. In six months' time or so, Pound had found a publisher in New York, Reynal & Hitchcock, who would issue it. From Dahlberg to Roosevelt to Pound. He was slowly getting somewhere.

Meanwhile, Dahlberg floated around this country and Mexico; he drifted with the wind from New York to Mexico City, San Antonio, to Kansas City, Chicago, Boston, Washington, New Orleans, to Los Angeles. And he published no new books in the years after *Do These Bones Live* (1941). He revised the book of essays and had it published in England under the title *Sing O Barren*, a title calling America a barren womb. Dahlberg more than floated, he drifted in the vacuum of ideology that had swept the country during wartime. He too suffered the death of liberalism, even though he

had renounced his socialist ideals years before. There was nothing but the wreckage of programs that had been rushed to the aid of the people in the 1930s. America was philosophically washed up, and this might have vindicated the acerb prophecies of this man, but it gave him no joy. The ground rumbled with the emergence of the warfare state, the Nu-Amerika; he knew it and his despite thickened his blood. He was coming to hate America, not merely to distrust it. It had blasted his last remaining shreds of a tender and hidden faith in reform. Why else had he become a writer? Even to him, the "affairs of men" remained "a chief concern," but only to reveal what these affairs were exactly, to those few who still cared about the spiritual ills of their barbarous nation. He published no essays between 1937 and 1950; it was a decade of silence for this brooding man, as he slowly fitted together the elements of his allegory on the American Sodom, in which he saw himself as a lingering flea: he would call his book *The Flea of Sodom*, a flea in America's ear, a nagging prophet still, a Cassandra that wouldn't stop foretelling doom. The odd thing about Dahlberg's prophecies was that one couldn't do anything about them: Dahlberg could only offer reasons for escape, but an escape to nowhere. The only order of life that seemed appealing to Dahlberg was the old inchoate civilizations of Judea and Athens, little polises, tiny nation-states of philosophers murmuring in the alleyways, teachers leading students into the olive groves below the last terraces of the city's edge, talking sense and wisdom, each citizen having about himself the deepest intimacy with his culture and with all the people who walked free within its walls. Olive groves; myrtle; small seaports of well-made ships; decency; democracy; order; a hierarchy of wits and talents. But there was only a crumbling acropolis in Athens, and the war had reshaped the entire map of Asia Minor so that the old biblical states had disappeared altogether. He would go to Mallorca one day later in his life to rescue a little of the vision of what a life might be like in the ancient world. But here was a true utopia which Dahlberg argued in his writings: one so utterly cut off by history that it stood nowhere forever, except as it might be realized in one's most whimsical and gallows humor. America was a big monster growing on all sides, swelling with common contents, in which nothing of its substance promised good. It was a gargantuan dungeon full of hopeless souls, ruled over by the fiercest among them: a nation of hairy apes stoking the coal furnaces of corporate ambition. So he drifted around, as he had done before when he was a

kid of eighteen just let out of the Jewish Orphan Asylum in Cleveland. He was a rover like the Beats to come in a few more years, who took to the road when things closed in too much. America was everywhere and nowhere at once, and you drifted to catch up with it: a kind of Heisenbergian patriotism, catching will-of-the-wisps, if you were a prophet of this nation. It ate at the pit of his heart to know that he was more in love with a man than he could ever be with a woman. He languished a Tristan on the Pacific shores, wondering what became of his dearest Charles, the ingrate. He cursed the literature of this country that showed men hungering after other men unable to imagine a single decent woman to love in all the pages of published work. He especially loathed the men of the American Renaissance, who despised female flesh and expected worlds to bloom from their Hamitic lust. He was as doomed as any of them with his own Peter Doyle to languish over, except that the man he loved was a genius, a flower budding forth, a man as good as himself, not some misfit whom you must hide in the backroom from your friends. But Olson had finally come a cropper in his political ambitions; he too was drifting around nine years after they had first met. The war was over. And Olson was gorging on the frantic visions of a madman who hated Jews. It was too much to bear. Dahlberg couldn't have known the difficulty Olson was having with Pound, who harried him with his vicious tirades in the tiny room at St. Elizabeths. Olson rushed home and poured out his fury into his notebooks, but he went back for more, just as he had waited under the porchlight in Rockport for a Dahlberg to come down hours and hours later to answer, finally. You did that with the fathers who were your masters. Until you could sickle off their testicles and heave them down to hell. As Ahab had tried to do with a whale, that father of no conscience. Ishmael was a son who washed up clinging to a coffin in the sea, while all around him the sea churned over the dead father, Ahab. Olson would leave Pound just as he had Dahlberg, but he would renew his friendship with Dahlberg, which was unique in the annals of Olson's friendships with men.

Practically any literate person could have called Charles and Edward together and explained to them that their two books, *Call Me Ishmael* and *Do These Bones Live*, were fundamentally opposed to each other; that the first showed how one system of beliefs and attitudes in America was about to die, and that another and better would slowly come to take its place. But in

Do These Bones Live, the American bones were bleaching in the desert sun. The horrible truth about America is that it was a dead thing that was still growing; it was like the diorite stone Olson had found in the Sumerian Gilgamesh epic, a stone that grew out of the water and had to be taken down by gods lest it get too high and fall on heaven. One man spoke of the future with hope and promise; the other felt night closing over the world for the last time. They could only grow apart from one another as they wrote and probed deeper into their separate visions of America.

But these letters are more than the chronicle of a friendship in America; they reveal the isolation of writers in America and show us the extent to which they taught each other the craft of writing; they were each other's mentors in their reading and research; they praised each other's work in the absence of any other critical commentary; they sometimes forced manuscripts onto their friends in the publishing trade in the absence of agents or other contacts; they acted as critical reviewers when the works came out because they went unnoticed otherwise. Most profoundly, they influenced each other until a style grew up and was shared between them. Olson owed much to Dahlberg; his style was made richer by the awesome example of Dahlberg's noble eccentricities; Olson was given the ancient world as a wealth of reference for his writing, and he made good use of this lore throughout his poetry; Dahlberg was the first to seize upon America as a subject for mythic analysis; his life was his own proper myth to be rewritten, if possible, for eternity until he perceived it with translucent clarity for the myth he knew it to be. Olson's mastery of myth in poetry is the core of his achievement as a poet. Dahlberg's gift to Olson was this sense that the past was immediate, alive, around you; his letters continually urged the past upon his reader, as though Greece spread out down the end of the next block of New York, and the Aegean was sparkling outside his window. He loved the past too much and perhaps as a result dismissed the present too quickly, and missed its promise and potential as an artist. It was in his excesses, his foolish histrionics in which he saw himself as one mythic or legendary figure after another regardless of the mundane crisis at hand, that Olson was trained to think in terms of a present marbled in the infinite of time and space, in which events were not separated by years or change but only by forgetting or never having learned history. In Maximus, Olson created a version of Dahlberg but who rose above his friend's terrible pathos

and personal dramas to the point at which this sense of the oneness of time gave him infinite sympathy for man, and a profound understanding of the continuity of events like shabby Gloucester and vacated Dogtown, or even of neon Amerika, which were mere swirls and shapes in a sea of endlessness. Olson gave back a friendship which Dahlberg knew was from a genius; Dahlberg stumbled at times between envy, jealousy, suspicion, and breathless surprise and respect in his unpredictable friendship with Olson. But for a man who saw his life as permanent exile from man and order, this one friendship was nearly perfect in the early years before their first break, and again in the late 1940s before their bitter conflict over *The Flea of Sodom.* If their friendship were predicated on being writers together in a culture that did not believe in writing, then their friendship broke when Olson could not be Dahlberg's ideal reader and reviewer. The beautiful illusion both men created between them, a culture of two who read and loved each word they wrote, snapped the moment Olson read something he could not believe from his friend and put down the book, as though he had to put down the life as well. For Dahlberg, that is precisely what he felt Olson had done, and the friendship was over.

The letters of Olson and Dahlberg are the complete extant correspondence in this edition. They have been divided into three equal parts, and Part I includes the correspondence from September 14, 1936, to October 9, 1948, in which the vast majority are Dahlberg's letters to Olson.

A Note on the Text

The texts of the letters range from hand-written postcards to typescripts of several pages on papers of varying size, and several telegrams. Dahlberg wrote on both sides of penny postcards and would enclose these in an envelope when he lacked other stationery. Some misspellings which are evidently mere typographical errors have been silently corrected; other errors, which may give glimpse of the writer's composing methods, however hasty the writing, have been left as is. Where a word was indecipherable, empty brackets are indicated; where the word could be deciphered with reasonable assurance but not certainty, the questioned word was given in brackets. No matter has been deleted for any reason. The locations of each correspondent are given, and where internal evidence suggests locations not

written by the correspondent, a bracketed location has been suggested. Dahlberg usually dated his letters, but Olson did not, until later years. The Dahlberg letters have been reprinted courtesy of the Special Collections, Wilbur Cross Library, the University of Connecticut at Storrs, and by permission of the Dahlberg Estate, which retains exclusive copyright of the correspondence. The Olson letters are reprinted courtesy of the Humanities Research Center, the University of Texas at Austin, and by permission of the Olson Estate, which retains exclusive copyright. Special thanks are due to George Butterick, Curator of the Special Collections, University of Connecticut, and to Ellen Dunlap, research librarian, the Humanities Research Center, for their kindness and cooperation with the editor.

△

[post card] [2 Grove St., New York City]
Sept. 14, '36

Dear Charlie —

Had to leave Gloucester hurriedly. Doubt whether I will get back. A mess of things here to straighten out. Soon as I am more tranquil will send you books. Meanwhile, hope your sinus & your knee are healing. Remember start work on the Melville book. I believe in you. I think I know. The sooner you start the better. Inaction spawns inferiority. This in haste.

Your friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[2 Grove St., New York City]
Jan. 21, 1937

Dear Charlie: —

Please pardon my delay in answering your letter. I was, of course, most pleased to get it and had intended to sit down & write you

promptly. For I know your problem and it touches some of the most porous things in me. But I have been writing—and reading without a let-up, and after my day's work I have shunned paper and pen—could not go near either.

I have seen Stieglitz & he speaks most highly of you. I hope you have written to him. He is an old man now. I think you should not hazard losing the precious moments of knowing him. Did you ever read Sherwood Anderson's "Story Teller's Story"[?] There is a beautifully sincere and deeply felt dedication in the book to Stieglitz. Do look at it when you are in the library. Waldo Frank is now in Mexico. He is the honored guest there of the International Writers' Congress. We exchanged a couple of letters before he left, but I did not see him again. Tomorrow I am calling on Ford Maddox Ford (you remember E.T's references to him).

I wish you would settle some of the seething things within yourself by writing: otherwise you will go along at a zero level & say to yourself in your most dire moments: ["]My god, nothing is happening to me." And of course, nothing can happen unless we make it.

However, I am not too worried about you. You have an extraordinarily warm and fluid personality to which people are strongly attracted so that even in time the cold blizzards and profound psychical wastes and moraines of harvard will melt to you. That of course, on the human side, & important, but not the real problem.

To return to the thing you must face, why don't you write, and why are you waiting. Maturity, like a maid-in-waiting, will not come to you. Besides, all books, no matter, when they are written, in what joy or quasi joy of ripeness, are ever anything but mistakes. So don't needlessly harass yourself over the young years traipsing in your bones. The bones are yours and so let's see their signature on the printed page. As I have said, once you get the book on paper, I will see that it gets published. But write!

I have been reading Poe's "Eureka." Poe interests me enormously but I don't know what Waldo Frank sees in that long piece of tedious godhead! Have you read it?

As for the magazine, I am deeply interested, but things like that must evolve slowly. So I have not pressed it. Will wait till Frank returns and then we will see.

Let me hear from you. Rosa wishes to be remembered to you & I send you warm friendship.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

P.S. Does Finch still feel the effects of my anger at the surrealists. It is always better to face a sound anger than to run away & hide in the crannies of Mt. Vernon.

[2 Grove St., New York City]
Feb. 11, '37

Dear Charlie

I am seriously thinking of coming up to Cambridge next Wednesday. Could you suggest some reasonable hotel that I could stay at? I don't know just what your own situation is at present, therefore suggest this. So don't misunderstand. I am only thinking of you. I wrote you a letter some time back, but as I received no answer, I imagined it was too difficult for you to write. And then maybe my letter was an inadequate reply. But believe me, I *felt* your letter, have thought of you much since. Do let me hear from you right away. I have been driving away, [am?] tired

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Western Union] [John Winthrop House]
1939 Mar 18 PM 7

CHARLES OLSON

DEEPLY HAPPY FOR YOU KNOW ONLY TWO IMAGINATIVE

ARTISTS WHO HAVE RECEIVED THIS TRIBUTE* HART CRANE AND YOU THANKS MUCH FOR BEAUTIFUL LETTER AND BOOK DEEPLY TOUCHED BY BOTH FORGIVE ME IF I AM A LITTLE BLATANTLY PROUD OF ALL THIS MY FAITH AND LOVE—

EDWARD DAHLBERG

July 16, 1940

My dearest Charles,—

To leave you, there, with those scummy shantied creatures was pain. It is homelessness for you; without natural touch; race.

Put to other things. I have been drinking at those sweet and sharp springs, Shakespeare's Plays. I have thought much of you while reading Lear, Macbeth, Troilus; thought of how you led me to these Founts; how wholly you had possessed the FOOL, in LEAR. You must return, apace, to your Visionary Cap and Bells; and make for you, and me, those Quickened Unheard Words.

Now, Charles, to look at your MYTH; and now for some seeming, sere pedantry from me. You know how unfraught Shakespeare's Lines are; either he Speaks in Angered Adjectives, unfettered by phrasings, prepositions; even articles; or he Cries:

> Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow

or to return, his spleen is Pure Epithet: Reechy, drenched, murky, without a clinging Substantive. Or when he hazards a Slow Detour, it is shaped in words of a syllable, in four to five letters:

> You do me Wrong to take me out of the grave

Your own sentence, here, is balked by flattened verbs, adjectival,

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*Guggenheim Fellowship

with barnacled fastenings of prepositions; redundant articles, and too many nouns. Of course, for the moment, have you lost your own Path; for everything you have done is against your blood. But again, and further: You are, yourself, most magical, in the seeming slow line, of short syllables: "springs of myth can mean"; "Dreams stop the machines" (Here stop, for me, is not thrusting enough); "Edenic springs"; "Rappacine in his garden of false flowers"; "We are the last 'first peoples' " (Here, you weaken your phrase, so good, with "of the world"). You overburden your perception with obstructive words that add nothing to seeing, hearing, breathing. The Verb, as Huysmans, said, is the central force of the sentence; and the power of the sentence lies in its Crisis. One begins a line to finish it with a Cry, a Moan; to get to the End. The thing, above all, is to Finish. But, see, Charles, how such uglified words impede, subtract;—in effect; like; maturity; in order; accident of the industrial revolution; maturity. Shun, above all, the word, maturity; it is a mare's nest, not to be pursued, mentioned; a gibbet-word. And, avoid, definition; it slackens anger; makes a polemist, a didactic out of the bursting rrathful tongue. And do not, to repeat, elucidate. Speech, must always be, unguessed, ecliptic. When one knows all, beforehand, or later, or too much, ennui, supervenes. But let me cite a few more words you should eschew; point of departure; spiritual life; temporariness; singularly; compulsion; adventurism, materially.

But enough of my quasi- pinnacle. As you know, I stand, aloft, on a foot-stool, and like the elder Maccabee, from this height fall off and break my neck.

Let us move to the meal, the mead, the grassy, flowered intuitions, in the Essay. I shall cite: "Homeless in his land, in his society, and in himself, he found his place in space." "There was in him an attraction to the origin of things, the first day, the first man, a centrifugal movement to the distances of the universe, to the Pleiades, to the unknown sea, the buried continent." I have, here, clipped your line a jot; it is very fine; question, however, centrifugal, and also, attraction. Or, to continue, and I am making emendations to compress

your own horizon; "Melville warmed himself by the first fires of man's life after the Flood". What follows, is, deeply good, too; "He sought origins so primary he was able, in *Moby-Dick*, to discover the lost past of America and establish a myth for a homeless people". Very lovely; but I don't like, establish. Or take this; here is something exceedingly probing, vitiated by the anticlimax "essentials"; "Melville lived wrong, but he lived so intensely his and his people's wrong that he forged something in Moby-Dick" and now the drooping "essential there is beauty in it". Perhaps, you might follow, Charles, wrong with "his people's Guilt".

To go on; "*Moby-Dick* is ultimately a private vision, in essence as antagonistic to man as Satan." The rest, refuse of phrasings I cast out. Here, again, and very lovely; "Lucifer has the beauty of the morning star because he is, wholly himself, in all his evil, as Moby-Dick". I have garbled your wording, in ungainly correction.

You have, Charles, already, the Seed, of a Book. You have uttered truths known and knowable only to an artist; and I uncover before your Monuments, Temples, before your Sphinx, as I have so often before. What I am doing is to return to you your own Memory; telling you, what was was Foreknowledge to your Self and which in the night of doubt, misery, ennui, we forget, and will always forget. Could we remember, continuously, we would be, again, in Eden; with the tasting of the Tree, of the Fruit of Good and Evil, we Forgot. How Jehovah looked; how to be naked, unashamed, how never to Hide, as Eve did, after she had listened to the Serpent, and Puzzled Adam.

Write, work, and believe in your Ilium, my dearest Friend.

Stanley [Burnshaw] asked after your book, again. I am seeing him, for lunch, Thursday; and when the time comes, we will combat the world, and take our Honey out of the carcass of the Lion, as Sampson did.

Let me hear from you, soon.

Yesterday, I bought the Carr book on Dostoevsky, for a dollar and

forty cents. Went to eight bookstores before I could put my hands on it.

I pray this is of some little worth to you, Charles.

I send you my warmest love, my faith and uncrack'd loyalties.

Your devoted friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

The ride back was a Boon to Doris and me; the afternoon was a raiment of breeze, sea, sun. Thanks for that. Doris, of course, sends her love to you.

August 1, 1940

My dearest Charles,—

Your deeply good letter came to me; what a pity my own thanks to you had to go to Dallas before reaching you. So are thanks given in this world. But, again, my pleasure and happiness I announce to you in the PIERRE you so generously gave me, and the shirt, too, which I have been wearing in contentment; delight.

When you mentioned the sad brevity of the Poet's Life, the few Plays, I wondered, had we spoke. For I had been thinking so, with pain, of Shakespeare kneeling in his Orisons, The Tempest, after he has freed Ariel and Caliban, and his 'power is o'erthrown', thinking, 'What a falling off was there.' This is the Anglo-Saxon burden, which Shakespeare carried, and which we have inherited. And no Englishman, or American, so far as I know, has eschewed it, nor Chaucer in the last part of Troilus, the last Christianly humbled lines, which, alas, are not the earthed irony and laugh, as it should have been; nor the Sonneteer, nor Melville.

This little isle, whose width from shore, bay, to tangled, wildish ocean, can be spanned in six to seven months, and whose length of pure beach line, is forty miles long, is likewise without an Ariel or

Caliban. In its dunes, pines, spray, toads, frogs, it is an Encantada; in its imaginative life and habits, — the skull and bone church, the clapboard, shantied cottages, without design, or heart-deity, or manual love, the witch-like faces of the natives— it is the corporate town. Thus, it is New England, the Cape, where, you, I know, must be right, about the sluggish shore, the way the sea sluttishly inclines upon the muddish land, America. Much preoccupied with Shakespeare and Dostoesvky, I, too, have been so near the final abyss, of 'barren hate'. My affliction in man is so accursed at moments that I am ready to fall into that slime-pit, there, where the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled. But it must not be; to go the other way — foregiveness is everything— I cannot go. It is a giant lie of the flesh and the bones, and I cannot so govern my organs; nor can I do the opposite, for I cannot live with such a disgraced and chaffed palate.

Now to the days here; they have been rather agreeable, save for those graveled glances, encounters which drop like coarsened things upon my veins. Of women, there is a little pentecost here; license, the riot of appetite prevails. When women take off their clothes, as they do in a resort, they really disclose all, and rush out to man with a louder trumpeted lust than is man's. It is somewhat expensive, though; I pay ten dollars a week for a room, facing the sea, the sands, and eat out. There are no other expenses but that; for in the evening, one walks with a woman under the Milky Way, and that is the shortest path to the haven we seek, to the Breasts, the long upheaval of the tresses, the Euphrates Valley, the Womb.

Breit has been very ill; should he be well enough to come, he and Clara will be here for two weeks. Dora may come, too; The fare from New York is only a dollar thirty five cents; an hour by train, and a forty minute journey over a sweet, billowy sea in a motor-launch.

Doris has not been here yet; last week we had too little money for her to join me; but tomorrow she will be here; it has been much anguish for me to think of her in the fumes and fires of New York heat. I wish, deeply, I could ask you to come as my guest; forgive me,

I cannot, although nothing more would I desire. The evil is not in my bosom, but in my purse. When you want to stay at the apartment, let me know; whenever you are ready, we will make arrangements.

How is Korin? Did he receive the book I sent him?

I have finished note-taking; now I must read them, over; and begin. I fervently hope you are writing, seeing, hearing, murmuring, as in a beauteous shell, ocean-shell.

So with all my Faith in the Book, in your pure, jetting Gifts, I give you also, my heart-friendship, and deep love.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

Edward Dahlberg
General Delivery
Ocean Beach
Fire Island
New York.

[handwritten addendum:]

From Notes

From Underground —

Petersburg — "the most
theoretical and intentional
town"

It's in on page 4 or 5,

Charles ----

April 9, 1947

Dear Charles: —

I did not know of the existence of your book until Easter Sunday. I rejoice in this small, mythic volume. A little book, no longer than the Song of Solomon, Amos, The Georgics, or Call Me Ishmael, is the mead, the honeycomb and the Jerusalem for my insatiable Soul. I love a book with no other mortal deposits in it but the pith of gnome and parable.

Literature is the pious commemoration of extant relic, ritual, and you have deeply understood this. No one before you has really perceived Herman Melville, the fabulist. There have been some goodly guesses about the albic Bull Leviathan, but the mythology of Moby Dick has been sealed and mummied. 'Who can draw out Leviathan with an hook?' says Job, and there is no better remark than this upon those who would fathom the American Continent, the occidental Jupiter, the White Whale, or art and letters without going back to humanity's birthplace. Herman Melville's head-devouring quest for Beginnings, his cry for the First Winds that blew upon Oceanus and Nilus and Pisa's springs where Father Zeus was born, has been as hid in the awful Book of Ahab as your own Enceladus underneath Aetna's Heap. Call Me Ishmael is the same priestly pang for First Causes which will always eat up every man who has a Deity in his brain; until we can fathom the Semitic and Phoenician mysteries before Sidon and Tyre and Gaza, our knowledge is gross.

But now to garner from your book: the son calling to the Father, the stricken skald weeping in a middle English, "O fahter, fahter, gone amoong" brings the tear from my heart, for my mother, too, has been lying in the darkling and dreamless earth for fifteen months, alas, not close by Absalom's Hand or Obadiah's Cave, but in alien and untrembling clay in a Hebrew Orthodox cemetery in New Jersey.

The Prologue, the record of those infernal anthropophagous acts, is done in a doughty prose. But the book begins for me with the

Shakespeare, of the discovery of Moby-Dick. Your speech wavers at the start; sometimes just by the dropping off of an article your line loses its natural force; then you fall away from your own poetic nature into the vernacular. But this is debris and the sea-lees you can sweep out at some later time with Poseidon's Trident. These are the exterior flaws which will make the literary Barabbases mock your lovely book. I cast out almost twenty pages from Do These Bones Live for the English publication, and it may be that I was still too gentle to my own skin. This is a little matter, something for you to consider when the book is reissued. I doubt, unfortunately, that this will be your present problem. Unless I speak foolishly, the citizens of Philistia will give neither lucre nor honor, not for at least two lustra. Genius is a stumbling-block in a cold, boreal land; this you know. But to return: I am your vassal-reader in the entire Shakespeare portion; your understanding of Melville's need of warming, pagan gods, Scamander and hot Triton and sweaty, priapic Vulcan who cohabited with nymphs and begat heroes, which every American poet requires if his genius is to have a hearth, is deeply moving and pulsant. I could call back to you so many lines and passages that you have written, so heavily marked is my copy. The book of the law of the blood is remarkably recorded; your citations from Melville are in themselves discovery.

I want to thank you, of course, very much for your words about me, very much. I have changed the title of Do These Bones Live to Sing O Barren, broken from Isaiah. Routledge in London is publishing it sometime this year, with a Foreword by Herbert Read. I have also another very small book, almost verse, done in the gnomic prose, called The Rational Tree, which the Mint, a Routledge publication, is printing this year. I had intended sending the two of them to you when they appeared, as I wanted you to have my tribute to you, and my feeling for you, in the English book, in your hands.

I am, as you know, an Ishmael in solitude; for the most part, the waterpots of Cana are empty for me, and I have to fill them by

reading the ancients, or walking or in my life with Winifred, or from the robust adamic laughter of my year and a half old son, Geoffrey, who is Jew, Irish and Norwegian.

Call Me Ishmael is a little piece of Melville prophecy, and you have my promise that it will be remembered, and with my affection and friendship.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

Edward Dahlberg
58 Barrow Street
New York, 14, N.Y.
Please do not give any one my address; this is not a booby pretence, but a caution which you probably understand.

April 17, 1947

Dear Charles: —

You have written a little book of genius. This I told you in a letter that you have not answered. However, your book, no less than your life and your churlish silence, has been a sore trouble to my heart. Your greatest faults are sloth and untrembling bowels. I rebuked you often for your sluggish spirit until you became dainty and effeminate about your time, until you became a sick, busy American. 'Must you dung as you run?' said Aesop to his Master. I have never had the coarse effrontery to tell another man that I was busy. However, I succeeded in word-flogging you into writing your book, and all the Grace and Goodness and Courtesy in it you conceived when you were close to my identity. The rest belongs to the world (O I have overcome the world! cries out the Nazarene in Luke), the beginning where man is just the fat gobbets for Cyclops' hideous gullet you must sooner or later reject. The Noah, the Christ, and the Moses, I believe you garnered up from the MS which I implored you to rewrite. I knew at the time that the book was to be dedicated to me. But now, because I took you unto my identity, gave you my table, and

whatever knowledge had come to me from hunger and all the mortal and perfidious aches, you have bequeathed the volume to your poor, dead Father; your acknowledgment to me has the same bitter obituary taste in my mouth, because you in the same manner of a perverse Balaam and a dainty and vain Absalom that you were to your Father, alive, are now offering to me, deceased, unto your own character and spirit. What is to become of you? You cannot feed any longer upon that brute Minotaur Leviathan or upon Oceanus. This is no mirthful human meal for a man whose soul is already too watery. A man should have a dry soul, said Heraclitus.

You have not been a Judas to me; that is a warm-livered error; your sin toward your nature and me is of a cold, stygian decoction. Your silence has been brewed in that foss and marsh where the muddy and mangled shadows abide, and is a portend of a stilly and fetid cessation in your spirit. You cannot ripen so, neither in the rain, nor in the sun. Nor will those brackish and Mammon caitiffs of Parnassus, Brooks, Van Doren, Pound be of much avail, unless you further submit. The other one, whose Gomorrah vice I find abominable, cannot sustain you.

You cannot have a culture in a land, especially in this mechanical, doomsday country, where everybody is so viley separated, and each man spills his spirit like the defiled seed of Onan. Poe could not go to the Quacks of Helicon, nor could Melville, and neither had any real unfolding. Man must talk to man, if there is to be a vision and a human spirit; otherwise everything is in the hands of Barabbas, the poetry, the handicrafts, and the thievish loaves. Could not Christ and twelve ignorant fishermen produce a legend!

Sodomy, which is the neutrality of the sexes and the human heart, and the ache for a united Babel of the world, all go together. This reminds me: about three years ago, I saw Harvey Breit, now a first-class citizen of Philistia and a sodomite, and I said to him: Why don't you give up Blake and Dostoevsky so that the whore in you will flourish more easily?

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[58 Barrow Street / New York City]
April 21, 1947

Dear Charles:

I have no need to withhold or even to change by one jot the epistle I wrote you on the 17th. My first letter to you was dated the 9th, so sharply uneasy was I about your depraved silence. As a pure, unknown nobody, your words were sent to me in great haste. What sorely troubles me now is that you are very likely to become a well-known nobody. I have in my hands your exsanguious, American syntax letter of thanks. You are discerning enough to know that you have given me a base and wily affront. I could have so requited you by not acknowledging the homage you make me in your book; but I do not know how to be lofty or to premeditate a cold and sly jibe for another mortal. Cato preferred to tear out his entrails rather than to expose them to Caesar; and every day that I go out into the streets, I cower in my mind before the thorns and the mischiefs, all the pismire Golgothas, one is likely to get from a tradesman, an American or a Charles Olson.

Your little transhuman volume of genius also disturbs me very much. How will you get over into the warming humanities to the other side of the Pillar of Hercules. Your book, the central text of your vision, is beautifully-wrought literary metaphysics; your citations out of the Journal Up the Straits are in themselves apocalyptic discovery. You first divined the Melville pining for the Crescent of Mahomet, for the Balm of Judea, for some human wedlock with Mediterranean and Asian pulsation. Your intestines quiver, but there is a mocking Pilate in your intestines. That is why I was so *useful* to you. At the root of all intellectual antisemitism is the laodicean serpent that hungers for the Jew's liver.

I foresaw your perfidy years ago. Your own Father's death was not enough of an admonitory lesson to you. You must also do the same to the man who fed your spirit, fathered your book, and deeply cared for you as the Nazarene must have loved John of Zebedee. The Thief

may go to Paradise, but if a man mire upon his own Seed, his Father and his Vision, he will rot impiously unto himself.

Yes, I know the appetite for pragmatical comfort and mediocrity in this land. I understand why you run after inferior people, why you greedily hanker after the artistic mountebank who puts Topeka and Telemachus together to make a canto. I comprehend the necessity in you to consort with the mediocre friars of syntax. But take heed lest monkish merchant Brooks bless you, lest Van Doren put the mouldy hands of Benjamin Franklin upon you. Take care lest the hypocrite College of Arts and Letters give you a National Award.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[58 Barrow Street / New York City]
April 25, 1947

Dear Charles: —

I know the fable about Euripides and the dogs that tore him to pieces for his impiety. But what sacrilege have I committed against you? Did I say it, or did it not come out of your mouth, "I have betrayed two persons, my Father and Edward Dahlberg." You revile me as a base merchant. Have I shown gluttony for praise or reputation. Do I whore after people who can help me? Am I the consort of the merchants of Toledo, Carl Van Doren and Van Wyck Brooks? Am I a companion of the lucre Pilates in Washington? Are these the seers and the political male Cassandras who perceive the world better than I. If so, you will please let me leave the world. In the Chester Plays one of the three curses is the world.

You say that I am outrageous to myself. Of course, I share deeply and covertly in the Guilt of man, and I do not say so to shed my own sins. My errors were not against you. Your book written under the dominion of my identity, is the proof of that. Why should you be so angered because I do not relish dungy Cyclops. Were you not queasy

when I committed the same sort of fault in endeavoring to understand the nekrophiles and the scatologists. Did you not cast away many of those pages, with my total acquiescence? Why do you revile my sputum. What preterhuman dust and spittle do I find in your letter. Timon once upbraiding Plato called it bile. You speak of simple and uncrooked words. You have said I speak and write so. What really angers you is that you are too perverse to own a fault. In our friendship I labored for you and not for myself. Even now, after sending you in my first letter good savory words & of the heart about your book, how do you reply? You cunningly smote me with an affected and fatuous note. I do not know why it took you three weeks to compose so few platitudes; in that length of time you should have done more. What is baleful is that you have sly enough bowels to know that you were smiting me, and it gave you atlean and lofty feelings. But never mind that: I did not raise my hand or heel against you; you did that. You are very irrational and untruthful when you say I buy. What, pray, do I buy and sell, my limbo, which you have no intention whatever of sharing! In our friendship, did I labor for your benefit or for mine. What was my earnest for being a co-editor of Twice A Year: I received one advantage, I saw to it that Lear and Moby-Dick was published. How did I fatten my blood-stream or my so-called reputation when I ran around getting your essay into the hands of authors who could help you. Was it not my mirth and advantage to give you the fellowship of authors which an unknown would have not had in at least a decade. I did not have it without pang and hunger and denial. You had it without any, because of me. Did I work for you or for me in getting writers to speak for you for a guggenheim award? Now, for the matter of paying some irreverence to your mother. You are again unjust: the one time I was your guest, I got the water and you the wine out of the Cana Pots. I am not a gross feeder, and what food is put before me does not matter, provided my host has the same frugal fare. You happen to be a rank eater, and if Plato and Socrates and the fable of Euripides and the dogs could not teach you that it is base to give your guest dingy food while

you sit opposite him and eat large chines of beef, then your belly and your unflagging appetite should have given you such breeding and wisdom.

If it will give you more felicity to have the newspaper Barabbases, the Van Dorens and Brooks, call you genius rather than I, I will try to bridle my tongue.

I imagine you have gotten some astute saws and apothegms which are more available for comfort rather than a life of ritual. You cannot go the way of the world and be a human artist. Nor can you pity the aching denials in Herman Melville while you denigrate mine. You can't be both spirit and mammon save to the low Yahoos. You see, I am much too pathetic and abject and obscure for anybody to bother trying to tempt me.

I do not know what you will think of this letter; it may bedevil you, or you may see, later, that though you now regard me as the watch-dog Cerberus baying at your entrails, you will come to understand that I was the one Guide of your spirit and nature and gifts.

You will pardon this penultimate piece [o]f human malice: May God make Charles Olson a failure, may his Call Me Ishmael go as unsold and as unread as Thoreau and Herman Melville. Should this happen, maybe then some day in some chasm where Dante casts those caitiffs, like Edward Dahlberg who was for himself and not for Charles Olson, we can talk about grossness and shame and the dogs that tore Euripides to pieces.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

May 2, 1947

My dear Charles: —

I do not know whether you are purblind to my letters or just froward. I have never spoken one profane word about your Father. I too deeply revere the remains of the dead. My poor, smitten Mother

lies as in an open sepulchre in my breast.

I do not envisage myself as Christ, or even as some wayward or fallen essence of him. I am a sick, nervous Jew, a base and whoring issue of Noah, Seth and Japheth. You know my attitude toward the Nazarene. All that I said is that I had the same feeling for you as Jesus had for John of Zebedee. How does that make me utter crooked words? Or how do I eat your book and your identity? I have never had any disciples; you were my friend; I taught you how vile our occidental earth is, how loathsome the American naturalists are, and I made you write. All that is astonishing and choric in your lovely and memorable Call Me Ishmael was written under the influence of my identity. Had I eaten you there would have been no book. What you added to the volume disturbs me. I told you why, and I do not see that it is outrageous of me to get queasy when Cyclopes devours human corpses. That kind of anthropophagous prose belongs to your inferiors. I say so now, and will say so later, because the book for me is a Fable and a Pilgrimage.

Why am I foolish when I abhor the world? and why is it literature when Timon moans, "Why, this is the world's soul." When Melville underscores this remark you are deeply moved, but when I say that in the Chester Plays one of the three curses is the world I am just repetitious and indulging in incantation. How many truths do you own? How often are you garrulous and repetitious and just squalid to your own soul? Wit and wise sayings do not come from a man's mouth continually. Solomon could write no more than two books, and Amos no more than a modern chapter. Would you then discard them as bores from whom you could not learn, and so turn to profligate Egypt or Sidon or Tyre for wisdom? The error would be yours. Do we not go constantly to the Masters simply to be reminded of those heart-truths we think we know? The greatest human spirits have had no more than seven or nine apothegms in their mouths, and only the coarse will say I have heard that man, be he Mark or Cervantes or Plutarch, say that before. Let us take your life and book as an example: How much profit do you think I have gained from your

epistles to me? What have you said in the second letter that you did not repeat in the last one. Does that matter to me; no it does not. I have a deep feeling about you, and if at times you bore me, well I bore myself perhaps more often. I have not seen you in at least six years, how many opulent and profoundly gifted lines have you been able to add to your book. According to my own sights what you have added, I am talking about the beginning, and am not in any way trying to diminish your Call Me Ishmael, has been exterior and an error. That does not matter either, because the book is so entire without the five or six or seven years that were added to it.

How to speak as simply as I can about the time when I was your guest; does one have to be clever to make you understand that it is base to sit at table and eat better food than you offer your guest. Aldington told me that Gerhardt Hauptman once invited him to dinner; he set a bottle of vin ordinaire before Aldington while he drank rich Sauterne. You will be lenient if I find a dismal cleavage between Hauptman's socialism and his hospitality.

How can you endure what even a Henry Adams found abominable. How can you be a companion of pusillanimous and low politicians whom Thoreau abhorred. How do you propose to guard your own vestal fires in the Augean stables at Washington? Shun the fleshly denials that Melville had, but don't think you can associate with boobs and Barabbases without punishing your nature.

Had you disavowed me for some Timon or Lear or Amos, I would have been stung, but I would have had to own that this was ripeness for you. But you forsook my friendship for the world, and I believe you know what I mean, and how I mean it. "Will ye go away?" asks Jesus. "Whither shall we go?" replies Peter.

You fumble in the human spheres in the book; your prose, so plangent & kelpy in the many pages on Melville's mythology, is American in the beginning. It is a perfect little book once you take those pages out. Well, you will have to wait awhile, maybe months or years, before you feel less greed about your own lines, and know that you will have to peel away the dross until you get to the quiddity of

your own nature which I honor.

At this instant, I have a deep and persistent feeling that the Herman Melville you so pity and kneel before in the Text you would have deserted in the Life.

Charles, we cannot always be as interesting as we think we are. Doubtless, while you were reviling me for writing you letters that were not as remarkable as I thought they were, you were unmindful of the boring observations you were making.

Be patient and ruminative, like Buddha and the Cow. If you are fortunate, you may, after a decade of ennui and stupidity and vice and reading, be able to gather up enough parables and feeling for another small book of genius, like, Call Me Ishmael.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[58 Barrow Street / New York City]
May 17, 1947

My dear Charles:—

Thank you very much for your letter. It is my deep delight to tell you that your prose has the sea and the kelp in it, the murmurous and plangent sound of low, evening surf. No wonder Homer worshipped Oceanus!

I have been brooding about you and your letter and for that reason did not reply at once. Besides, I have been in a defiled, syntax classroom at Brooklyn Polytechnic College. But I would rather do that than get money out of books, not because I am pious, but because I know that lucre and reputation are the same thing today. Have I not observed Waldo Frank run after reputation with sainted bowels, and is he not furtively hankering after Mammon. I do not see him any more, because he writes so badly, and that is a good enough reason. In his upside-down aesthetic prose are all his monkish affectations. However, in a European country, even in England, where people are

less sick with hurry and some homage is still given to a writer, he would probably have written one good book. But here, like a man who is uncertain of his potencies, he has to keep on writing to prove his powers. I'll get my Ilium in other ways!

You feel that I am some kind of United States St. John of Literature, content with the aching genitals and penury of the wilderness. Or maybe you think that I am wooing oblivion slyly, really hoping for a headstone Immortality. What makes you think you know America or Washington any better than the author of Bottom Dogs or Flushing? What makes you so sure that you perceive the world more sharply than Edward Dahlberg, street-urchin, orphan, laborer, vagabond in these States? Is it not intellectually perverse of you to inveigh against the world in CALL ME ISHMAEL while you defend it in your letters? Am I a fool for upbraiding such dove-vendors of Moloch as Van Doren and Brooks, and am I garrulous for repeating over and over again until I am ashes and dust that a thief is a thief and a liar is a liar. When I stop doing this, then you had better be on guard against me. Why should it irk you if I cannot have bland and lukewarm relationships with people who are to be despised and revealed for what they are. How long do you think you can get succor from these people, just so long as they can patronize you. You'll have to be a toady, and a sensitive man is more likely to make a more charming and gifted sycophant than a dullard. It is quite simple, a peasant or an illiterate charwoman can smell such a truth and understand it. You cannot be a member of the National Democratic Committee and expect to go up to the Mountain of Frankincense with Saul's timbrel, wine and loaves. Saul relinquished his heritage for the cattle of the Amaleks, and that is precisely what every young American iconoclast has done. I believe that a breaker of images in a beautiful human culture is a wicked person, but that he is a seer and a poet in a low and lethargic civilization. But what is the little American cycle: first the writer is a young, acerb Timon, but as soon as he gets into comfortable, pragmatical relations with his environment, he is a pickthank friend of the national culture he once abhorred.

Sherwood Anderson, who was much less gifted than you, he was half a Philistine and half a poet, would not go to Hollywood. Look at William Carlos Williams, the baby doctor with the obituary satchel of pills. He had talent and defiance, but during the war he was a police-sergeant of American shibboleths. Ibsen said that it is not necessary to make a definition of art, but what was important was to struggle with those who are against it. The people who hate arts and letters and painting at present are the artists and writers.

I was clairvoyant enough to recognize you in two to three minutes. Do you imagine that if there were a covey of obscure souls and geniuses in this poor, smitten and coarse country I would not somehow know about it. Tell me where all these pulsant and hidden human beings are and I'll run after them so that I won't be so lonely and neglected.

Another thing: It does not matter who influences whom. What is important is that Book. I never patronized you, I argued with you vehemently to make you shed Mark Twain and Hemingway and a number of other literary boors, and you in the end uttered your identity and not mine, and so you proved your own pulses and our friendship. If I am foolish enough to believe that I had a deep influence upon you and your work, and you think I have not, that, too, is insignificant. What we did prove is that two people, with tender feeling, could labor each for his own spirit together. It is the separateness of those individuals who pine as solitary figures for Thebes, Ithaca, Sidon, for the spice-producing countries, that makes it impossible for us to have a literature. Each of us alone is a polluted Onan who spills his seed and his vision.

I have been reading the ancients, making ready to do a book of poetry, and be sure I am not looking for the Cana Pots with which to quench my visionary thirsts. I ache for Arabia Felix and tender human climates washed by the Father of the Streams. If, in the meantime, I go back to the Cape, and find nothing there but a little of Matthew's Salt, I at least can take Strabo with me.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

April 20, 1948

Dear Charles:

You say I am obscure to myself and perhaps ought to be. I do not gainsay that; he that gazes too deeply into his nature is likely to see either Minerva's owl, dragon, and the people, or Jeremiah's three beasts. Man we know is more automatic than intellectual. Write a book, and all you can do is to pray for your powers, and then nobody knows what may happen. Whatever my vices of Baal may be I am haughty rather than overweening; I am too much of the Iscariot waif to be otherwise. Of course, I know more than the American; but such wisdom is penury. Besides, man's knowledge, like the poison of Demosthenes, is drunk from his own quill.

I am deeply mindful of your good nurturing words, and for an instant I go up as Saul did to the Mount of God with the loaves, the flagon of wine and the timbrel, only to drop down again into Lethe's region, America, where the earth is accursed and the fable dead. Jupiter fastens the isle, Delos, when Latona is pregnant with Apollo and Diana; and we, too, when we are teeming with our visionary progeny must have something graspable, or be without vision and poems. You understand this so profoundly in *Call Me Ishmael*, and this I pray you will never lose. The foolish infidel American believes he can write without going to the founts of Helicon, to the hills of Judea, to the Nile lily. "Canst thou draw out Leviathan with an hook?"

Perhaps you should know a little of my life; my fate you can augur; I will never be what I never was; though I walk in the meadows of the asphodels for whatever little books I may conceive. I have almost completed a small volume about the size of *CALL ME ISHMAEL*; but I live so apart from the world that I do not know what I will do with it. Herbert Read tells me I have a small, loyal following in England, but I see no one pursuing me. I have another son, Joel, named after that lovely minor Old Testament verse, and I pray that his tender head has been blessed and shaped by some ancient Prophet

by the Euphrates. For the rest, I have been teaching this past year at Boston University, and am looking for a better place, where education is not a basilisk or the Medusa that turns the bowels to stone. The summers here are hallowed, the ocean a deity, but the winter has been a Cimmerian and misty Bosphorus in my soul.

I do not believe in Jesus as you know; I hardly think he was more than a hurt and wandering Word, as the Gnostics conceived him to be. However, I have no rude phrases for him, be he the Word or the several messiahs that must have come out of Isaiah as Russian literature issued from "The Cloak" of Gogol. There are many parables in Matthew and Luke that have dropped like spikenard into my heart. I try to reread a line, a gnome, and to use it as I can.

As I told you, I have read no modern book since *CALL ME ISHMAEL.* I never looked at a book by Ford Maddox Ford until he died, and I peruse nothing of Herbert Read's. This is not my food; my rapture and my eden are in the ancients, and I go to them to comprehend my perplexities or to give more form to my opaque identity. Of late, I studied The Hyperion with great amazement. His use of mythology, such as "Where Cybele and the bruised Titans mourned" is my conception of homage to the Muses. Your book has been read by my students and by admiring academics. I have little relish for the herd academic mind, but he has not such stygian cunning as the writer.

You must know that I have always been a truthful friend to your genius, though you once said I forsook you. Had I coarse vanity I would agree. When I said to you, "Go," you had already left. I had labored for your spirit, and when I saw Actium almost won you took your sixty vessels and fled.

At the moment, I am weary; my Cana waterpots are empty.

Thank you again for your words, Charles, I savor them as I do your inscription to me in CALL ME ISHMAEL.

My affections,

EDWARD DAHLBERG

Edward Dahlberg
Wellfleet, Box 42,
Cape Cod, Mass.

Charles.—I am mortally wounded by silence; it is more destructive than the tongue.—

EDWARD DAHLBERG

The Flea of Sodom

"O my friends there is no friend."
— ARISTOTLE

Let us admit, going over the Atlantic
was a tragic mistake, and that he who drinks
the vile, oceanic froth of Cerberus
loses his memory, and goes mad. Hercules
took his cows no farther than Cadiz, beyond
which men haunt the pitchy fens of the
cormorant and the unclean ibis.

Homer's geography is purest Metaphysics; Cimmerians
occupy fetid, purblind Bosphorus, which is near Hades;
Tartarus almost touches the Pillars, more perfidious than
the Sirens. Hera went no farther than Europe's Oceanus
and Odysseus trod upon the marge of the sea at the
Gates, and retired. The lotus his companions ate yield
spicy, Afric sleep, not Atlantic's horrid Lethe.

Do not pass the Pillars, hankering after new places.
Shun hyperborean lands: impious Prometheus was banished
to the blizzards of Caucasus. Recall how soon Cadmus
forgot the Phoenician shores girt with shells whence
Helen's robes got their Tyrian purple, and sowed
dragon's teeth from which the gory Theban buckler,
spear and iron javelin were wrought. Unknown
countries are Sorcerer's regions of baleful ore. It

is better to be slain by a bow of cornel wood or
face a warrior in a helmet made of the rind torn from
the cork-tree than perish by metal. The weapons by
which man dies reveal whether he lived with the roe
and the hind close by the founts of Helicon, or in
Boreal, gloomy towns. The fleecy Ram of Colchis,
Jason's cargo of copper, iron and coal, is Caesar's Furnace.

Forsake the metal cities, brewing Chimera's noisome
breath, lest you disappear. Zeus' docks are in soft,
Lybian climes. The Bethlehem manger is not far from
Apollo's Ethiopic stables. Jerusalem, Sidon, Crete,
Egypt, Demeter's Basket, is the Kosmos. The dog-
parent, Atlantic, is the sea of oblivion: unhallowed
people, return to the tender fig where the MUSES
sing.

June 6, 1948

Dear Charles:—

I spent the whole sunny afternoon with Herbert Read on the banks of the Charles River. He gave me a clymene plucked from Agamemnon's tomb, and I put into his hands CALL ME ISHMAEL which you never bothered to send me. But then you have your Graces and Dis-Graces. I showed Read lovely lines I had marked, and since I had *bought* two copies of the book I persuaded him to take the one, hoping he might find an English publisher for it. But the Adamic Shame is everywhere, and the small tribe of artists is rapidly disappearing from the earth. I cite Read's remarks: "I enjoyed his book (Charles Olson's) immensely, but wanted to acknowledge all the time the debt he owes you, and which he admits in his oddly interpolated tribute. I think the book has faults—it is willfully disjointed, unconstructed. But the observation is keen, and keenly expressed, and it

moves on the heights of imagination. It is worthy of its great theme—touches the 'inmost centre' of a tragic genius."

Of my own little book he says: "I wish I had some consoling news for you, but my own enthuasiasm for FLEA OF SODOM has not met with the response in the office. Raggi is still a sick man, or I might have relied on him for some support. But to the sales people you are just the author of an unsuccessful book, and there is no inclination even to look at another manuscript, especially one which, on account of its size (very small) presents a special problem in salesmanship. To argue that it should be treated as poetry is no argument at present. . . My own deep pleasure in your writing is not unmixed with a certain appreciation of the salesman's point of view—he can sell cakes and ale and even savory spices, but you are asking him to persuade a constricted multitude to buy a dish of aloes." You see then how it is; either you turn to Pontius Pilate and mock your own entrails or you kneel to Vision, praying that along with the gall and the vinegar you ascend the Mount of God with the loaves, the flagons of wine and the timbrel. You, my dear Charles, are taking neither. You write me a very long letter, giving me frankincense and all the spices of Arabia, and when I reply to you, you simply don't bother to write me again. You are discontinuous, or you've got the occidental disease, being busy. Had you continued to be my friend, the book would not have had those faults in construction, which is simply saying that in the beginning the perceptions are not so swiftly formed as the blessed lines, verdure and sea and ambergris cropped from your Atlantic Ida. Ah, but do not get vexed with me! All that I can say for myself, dwelling as I do on my lonely, and rugged Parnassus is that "Oblivion cannot be hired."

Do you recall how forward Waldo Frank used to be with you, and how irascible you became, and how you even sat in your drawers in his presence to humble him. But you, too, have a perverse heart, and somewhere in this little book which none will have I have written, The froward heart breaks the bones. What are we to do? to lie while

we rot; I hate a thief, cannot endure Barabbas, but the roundabout man makes me rave.

I hope you won't mind any critical remarks Read made about you, since he really cared for the book, and that is what I wanted him to do. All books are errors, or else how could we conceive them?

My affections to you, Charles, and I pray that you try to be simple about simple things; do not mind my counsel too much, you won't heed it anyway. I am a zealot and a quixote fool, that you know, and I have to persuade people, alas, I have nobody to convince save you, I furtively hope, and Herbert Read. The others are gross, of the world and Caesarism. Meanwhile, I read with quiet mirth and benefit Livy and Strabo, and make ready to do a narrative poem about my poor, hapless Mother (about whom you never so much as mentioned, though I sent you sweet, consolatory words of the heart about your Father), going back to ancient common weals, Judges' and Numa's and Cadmus', pouring into the vial of Remembrance the Missouri, the Euphrates and the Nile.

I write, praying to God to bring to my parched stones the Angelis Fountain. O I revere Mnemosyne and Helicon, but what would I not give to put upon my lips some granule of dust where Elijah tread.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

Edward Dahlberg
Wellfleet, Box 42,
Cape Cod, Mass.

[Wellfleet, Cape Cod, Mass.]
July 1, 1948

My dear Charles:

I thank you deeply for your fervent letter. Some one at Harvard, one of the business men of the nine Muses, told me you had received another Guggenheim award, and I am very happy that you did. I can-

not get any of the five barley loaves and two fishes from them. Moe, one of the ward heelers of the arts, will do nothing for me. They have made very few mistakes, and you are one of them. As you know, some gray-haired boy gets their spices which we require to put those holy words of the heart on papyrus. I think the dismembered body of Osiris was put into a papyrus boat before it was cast into the Nile.

I am very glad you sent Waldo Frank, a dove-brained effeminate of Ephraim a waspish epistle. He abhors the two of us. The other evening I was at the home of some one who had dinner with Dame Frank and Edmund Wilson. The pair of anti-artists were giving applause to the Paris cafe charlatan, Henry Miller and assailing your book. I said to the man; "Waldo Frank is a sodomite liar. Could he write one of the lovely, sea-pulsing lines in CALL ME ISHMAEL I would be his friend."

You are right, of course, in your anger against Herbert Read. But an English man of letters is so far above the American writer with his cormorant gullet, that lascivious Adam's apple for prurient newspaper notice. You remember how gracious Ford Maddox Ford was, and there is not a doubt that he would have given you lovely tributes for your book. I have never had a civil relationship with the American mountebank of letters. Yes, there was Sherwood Anderson; I enjoyed being with him rather than talking to him. And Aldington, with his blemishes, had not the pretences of a Barbabbas and a buffoon.

I must tell you, that Waldo Frank did not even bother to reply to my petition. I only hope that the Erinyes will pursue him. He never committed any great sin or adamic vice; but let him be cast to the fish for his spite and his coarseness. I suppose we must not forget his gluttony.

Read, I am sure, does respect your imagination; but he has that frugality of the hyperborean. I sent him my MS and he said it was poetry and wanted to find a way of publishing it as verse, but he had fewer words to say about it than he had for CALL ME ISHMAEL. Yet when we spent the day in Boston together he took out two clymenes

from Agamemnon's tomb and gave me one of them. Do not be severe with him; he would be deeply impressed with you if you and he talked.

I am deeply sorry that you and Connie cannot come up for the week. There is a genial covey of people here, summer scenery, of course, Paul Magriel whom you know, and Gonzales the artist. All pay me homage, and I know none is a friend. It takes great genius to be a friend; doubting Didymus, nor timorous Peter was, and though John of Zebedee leaned up the Master's breast at the Passover meal, what did he do for the hapless man who took the hyssop and the gall for a Kiss!

You have my heart-gratitude for what you say about my Mother whose pilgrimage upon this doleful earth was such a pang and wound. I have been reading for over two years for this book of verse. Fools call me arrogant, and yet I dare not write one line without the succor of a Master. I have been reading Dionysius and Diodorus, ay, even the rhetorician and poet Ausonius shows me how to form a winged line. A poet is always a journeyman, a humble and fumbling apprentice. I am only arrogant with my adversaries whom I recognize on the quick of my soul.

I would like to see you do the Moby Dick ballet; it would please me so if you could get some money for it, — that dragon, money, that spews forth its noisome fire at God, and who is, perhaps, peer to him who creates, or greater, for is not destruction in the flesh of man so much deeper than the will to prune a tree, or build a littoral city, or to make a piazza where good men can talk. How I pine for Abydos, or Sidon where Paris got his purple robes for Helen, or mourn for Rachel's Well, or go out of my wits for Sais. We are born in a most unseasonable century, and if we do not gather together, four or five of us, we will all be lost, and the cicadas will be mute for a thousand years.

I want to get a copy of my MS. I wonder, then, Charles if you would read it. It is a very brief book. Oh, I must tell you, that is why the men of Gaza and Ashkelon so abhor us. Our books are too short.

What know they of Joel or Amos or the Georgics or Bucolics? Do they recollect that the whole of Heraclitus' fame rests upon five hundred lines. The same is true of Empedocles. A line of his I love so much is this, "The blood around the heart is the thought of men."

If you and Connie can find a way of being our guests, it will be our savory delight to have you.

I am very sorry about the postponement of the French translation of CALL ME ISHMAEL. That may bring you English publication. That is why I gave your book to Herbert Read. If I find an English publisher for my little volume, be sure that I will labor to see that your own book is printed in London. I am not hankering after many readers; it is a dismal folly.

Forgive me, if I said anything about the PREFACE that irked you; do pardon me. I do not covet your Gift, not because I feel too sure of myself,— believe me, underneath my little rock of Peter sings the Worm. Give me for my life and spirit two or three Charles Olsons, Men at Mamre, and I can sit like Abraham meditating underneath the Terebinths waiting for Vision. But I ask much, too much!

Your friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Wellfleet, Cape Cod, Mass.]
July 29, 1948

My dear Charles:

I have not replied to your kind note at once for a simple and plain reason: I am retyping the MS. and making corrections, generally curtailments, whenever I can. Should the heat become too rancid for you and Connie, or should it be possible for you to get away to the shore for Poseidon's brine, please come up.

I respect Keats deeply; that you know; I cannot mention him without *speaking feelingly* of him. I intend to look up the letter to

Reynolds.

Once you signed one of your letters Troilus, and I did not understand. In my friendship with you I do not think I have ever been a male Cressid; I hope not.

I wrote to Read suggesting that we form a small Anglo-American-French group of writers. We know that the real poets are hid in some grassy crevice of the earth, in Provence, more likely in the gutters of Paris and London. Otherwise, who is going to print a man of feeling, and who will read him? There is even more coarseness in the world than depravity. There are no simple, stupid people in America. That kind of peasant brain has vanished. Ignorance begets malice as Isaac begat Jacob.

I wonder why you who have so many graces of the heart sign yourself yours. It was that kind of little secretarial epistle that you originally wrote me that so irked me. I cannot endure, American lack of feeling; and I cannot stomach, I beg to be your remains, or I am insincerely yours, or untruly yours. That sort of thing in the pachydermatous American makes my navel sick.

I have always had profound affection for you, and I send it to you again; you know John Keats' remark about the friendship of two men, "passing the love of women." When we speak of Keats, we are not thinking of Ham, or the dove-brained effeminates of Ephraim. Once you asked me about the rites of Moloch, which was a homosexual idol, I am sure; they passed their seed, through the fires of Moloch, or put their progeny into the oven of that loathsome image of Philistia.

Your friend,
EDWARD DAHLBERG

August 3, 1948

My dear Charles:—

I have just finished, and I am infernally depleted. This is my

autobiography since our infernal cleavage eight or nine years ago. I always wanted you to understand that I was never in competition with you, not because I am so sure of myself. Nothing could be less true of my own pulses. All I care about is to utter some Edenic Truths, and perhaps either in dream or in trance to lower my eyes as Helen descends the steps or to bow my face to the ground as Abraham did when God spoke to him. Alas, no one has spoken to me, "either Jehovah" or man, and here is my little monologue, part fable and part essay.

People have said I have deeply influenced you. This is a foolish remark. Of course, I probably have, and that is why you wrote as you did, very beautiful, murmuring sea lines, and not as I could. There can be no literature without a small tender group of men of feeling who are constantly sharpening each other. What people who do not understand such a simple truth as this is that I could not have written CALL ME ISHMAEL, or even one lovely line in it.

If we are to continue in our friendship, and I wish it for my sake and also deeply for yours, not because I deem myself a purer imagination than yours, but because you require my guidance. Take this, please, from a man who says this without pretence, who is not flamboyant, and who is sufficiently obscure to have plain truthful words in his soul. I want to use Sir Thomas Browne's "Oblivion cannot be hired" as the superscription for this very small book if I can find some one who will print it. I do not say publish it. I do not hanker after many readers; what I want are a few friends, ay five or seven or ten, if that is not too much. If God were willing to spare Sodom and Gomorrah if he had ten devout kneelers for his frankincensed altars, should I be so overweening as to expect more or as much.

I pray to God and to my poor, tender Mother who are the Cherubims of what Truths I may know that I have written without deceit or any surreptitious vanity.

Your faithful and affectionate friend.

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Western Union Telegram, Undated] [Wellfleet, Mass.]

EDWARD DAHLBERG

FLEA DELIGHT. I GREET IT AS FIRST LEVITICAN FABLE. BEAUTIFUL.

CHARLES

August 17, 1948

My dear Charles:

I sent you a telegram from Boston. I have bursitis, an abhorrent word. Little wonder that the fabric of language is so wounded, for what is more indecent and base than the medical, the economic, the sociological or psychological vocabulary, which is the source of modern literature. I must return to the hospital for a general anaesthesia for a bone-manipulation.

I sent you another wire in reply to your own that came to me when I was as mortally slain as the vile kings in the slime-pits. I give you then, my deep, deep thanks for this revivification. Your letter, which I had not answered, because my faculties were drugged with codeine, I keep as the plaister of figs for my afflictions.

Your rearrangements I have accepted almost without change, Your omissions I imagine are correct; I say it this way intentionally. Recall Charles how deeply vexed you were with me when I suggested certain deletions in CALL ME ISHMAEL. Only in the full, amatory excitement of writing, when one loves every word, am I sure. Later I am very uncertain, for my brain is too drained for such knowledge. You remember that amazing line from Empedocles I use in The Rational Tree, "The blood around the heart is the thought of men." But after that blood has ebbed, after one has come down again from the Mount of God, having worshipped, eaten the loaves, drunk the flagon of wine, and played the cithera, the deity in man's breast has

expired. Again I must say, I can pray that The Rational Tree is what I had asked heaven for. Suppose what I thought was the Burning Bush is sumach, as I believe some ancient has surmised, am I to be brazen-necked about it. If you put your heart in Esau's hairy palm, and he rejects it, you must then fight the wild Ancestors of Edom with all the weapons of your soul.

The Mint in London was supposed to have brought out The Rational Tree; two issues of the Mint, an annual publication, and a subsidiary of Routledge, have appeared, but I do not know whether there will be a third. Twenty thousand copies of the second were printed, and only eight thousand were sold. I am always in the issue that does not appear!

I cite a droll paragraph from Herbert Read's letter to me: "Last week an American publisher came into my office and asked me if there was anything new in the world of letters. I said that the only new thing of importance was by an American writer. I gave him your name. He knew you—it was James Laughlin, and he went away in a meditative mood. You may hear from him." I have not.

I have suggested to Read that we organize an Anglo-American-French group to publish those psalmists hid away in the grassy crevices of the earth, and whose songs only the pastures and the cicadas can hear. Naturally, should this happen, I know of only one American writer who has a lute and a timbrel in his spirit whom I would ask to join this little band of chanting augurs, and his name is Charles Olson. I know I have not thanked you enough, but then no man can ever be grateful enough for truth from God or balm from man.

Know that I love and esteem your Imagination.

Your friend,

EDWARD DAHLBERG

Black Mountain College
Black Mountain, North Carolina
[September 16, 1948]

My dear Charles:

I want to send you my bounty of thanks for your gentle sympathy and companionship. I am very sundered at the root of my identity, which has become a widowed waste-land where I weep with the cormorants and the bats for my angelic infant son, Geoffrey. I cannot fathom these furied Medusas who bedung your soul while uttering words of mercy for your hindrances.

I earnestly hope that Connie is quickly coming through. These would be sweet Oceanic afternoons on the sands for you and her, and a plaister of kelp and brine would heal her as Isaiah cured Hezekiah.

I am too torn to write more.

I do not know whether I can endure the life here smitten as I am. Could I get part-time teaching in New York or Washington I would leave at once. I have not the sinewy courage to go out into combat against pachydermatous students. I have already given two lectures and it was vanity and a striving after wind. I am sick unto nausea of trying to prove myself to others who lurk in the thistles and the cockles waiting to snare me.

I wanted to give Sam Rosenberg a copy of Sing O Barren, but he ran away.

My love,

EDWARD DAHLBERG

Washington
Monday September 20 xlviii

Edward:

No, the Tree and the Flea are not one. It is the Book of Edverbs,

the Mount of Dahl, pressing. It is wise as men are not. It is thick, as though around the heart. It is apothegm, apothegm, uttered, uddered, and thrusts, from your appetence. It is a Book, of itself—or the Mother of other Fleas. It is not the Flea.

I have just read it, marked it, would wish to make immediately selections from it as you have from Laertius, Chaucer, Hesiod, Amos, to put into my blood its sayings. If I sit on my chair, the ass's stool, and make recommendations, you will know I know the ears are big, and a man's mouth wide.

If I had my hand press (others bake bread) I would print FLEA first, then TREE, both such things as we recover from the ancients, codex, incunabula they call them, seeds, I prefer, papyri, biblum, out of pyramids.

((Such sentences as:

> . . . . . a Roman Egypt whose figs give suck to the asps in Cleopatra's Basket
>
> Ishmael, in his wild ass's solitude, will bite off his flesh for a soft look. (Do I not?)
>
> Culture is conversation
>
> a man of feeling kneels in his heart at the mention of Solomon and Chaucer
>
> the energies of the soul parched
>
> Evil and spoiling are in the imagination of families and races
>
> the children of Israel preferred to eat the leeks, the cucumbers and the melons as slaves in Egypt than go to battle

The whole trembling Part 5: The seer was he who sat (Beautiful sentence! And the paragraph:

> Be quiet, my ribs; stay home, lambs and goats of Ai. Rest; the ships of Tarshish are in your room: Eden is in a chair. Sit, my heart, and Schechem and Uz are thine

Argos was the udder of the land, according to nourishing Homer

copying down everything he said on the shoulder-blades of oxen

Or, Dr Swift, and the horse

Shame is man's portion, and where there is no modesty the Cicadas are silent

Famine and scab do not plague the heart like insolence. (Or a sentence not in Tree: Ignorance begets insolence as Jacob begets Isaac)

Courtesy is the handmaid of learning

Vice is not so miry close to the Cherubims . . . (and the images of the Proof)

Hebrew literature is admonitory lore

If a truth is uttered by a froward person it should not be heeded until it rests again upon pure lips (and the mighty lines which follow)

What matters most

On haste: dung as you run

And the Words of what can the mind do. . . .

TO USE WORDS WRONGLY CREATES EVIL IN THE SOUL

The lovely phrasing "When the past was beginning to fall somewhat feebly on Homer's ear"

THE OBSCURE REGIONS, OR THE IRRATIONAL, ARE THE MOTHER AND FATHER IN THE SON

Testicles — by Ceres!

The ass that made the grapes more plentiful by browsing on the vine-shoot taught men how to prune

Pascal on fear

The will empowers the soul

The passage which begins: "Eden is a shepherd's culture in which there is no time."

The head which jibes more than venery

ennui and fire will roar in his veins like the Fires of Gomorrah

and not to interrupt the Festival of Ceres

It is not difficult to say why I separate the Tree, Gomorrah, from the Flea, Sodom. It is the presence of the narrative, which is the Judas who is not present, even tho his creator is, his creature, in the Tree. Nor is it the narrative or the I as decoy: it is that Horror, that which is, is juxtaposed. The eagle AND the cow.

The Tree is the "Sayings of Dahlberg" as those of Socrates which you could not tell me where to find.

The Flea is one of the lost tragedies of Diogenes.

End: you will guess, if you know me, that that I read the Tree proves today was the first chance TO SIT. And these notes will tell you plain what you know that it takes more rumination than I have yet had to speak.

Constanza improves most slowly. All I was able to do was to divert and prepare myself by buying Bohns and Loebs: Athenaeus, Hesiod, Catullus, the Anthology, the Morals, Theocritus, Herodotus, Percy's Reliques, John Lyly's Plays, Elizabethan Lyrics. I traded all week: Lowdermilk was best, tho Reifsneider is now in my hand. But I have lost Ornstein: he could not stand that Reif gave me 13 dollars for what he offered 7!

Do not, please, be upset by what I have said. Am I so wise? I am not. I am in love with FLEA — and as I told you, I am of such a nature . . . . TREE is very beautiful.

Your friend
CHARLES OLSON

Hotel George Washington
23 Lexington Ave. at 23rd Street
New York 10, N.Y.
September 29, 1948

My dear Charles:

Would you please send this letter on at once air mail. I have picked up some teaching but must find an inexpensive room. I got a much softer letter from Winifred. What chattering, mournful doves we are when we have no need to be a serpent. She needs money, and so I must earn money to send it to her to help keep her and my two infants.

This in haste, Charles. Please let me hear your decision. I have interviewed about five Columbia graduate students, none of whom I could send down with any assurance. Am I to appoint a teacher for Black Mountain College who will praise Hemingway and syntactical Tate and so help remainder our books.

That reminds me, in conclusion, American neuter style, I beg to remainder your books; you need not bother about mine. I have always had the most chivalrous publishers who have taken care of this for me.

I do earnestly hope that your Constanza is thriving again.

My love,

EDWARD DAHLBERG

Edward Dahlberg
General Delivery,
Church Street,
New York, N.Y.

[added in printed script]
I got your book for nothing, a pure metaphysical price, signed by you!

[Enclosed with letter to Olson]

My dear Winifred:

On October 28th our darling Geoffrey will be three years old. I should like to buy clothes for him and to kiss him. I must tell you, Winifred, I prefer to be the raging Furioso than the soft and nimble Iago. You do yourself great wrong in heeding the counsel of easy spoken deceit. I wish for yourself you would depart from the vile Bosshards and Moore. Why do you go to people whom you abhor; you ever looked for Moore's death and the Bosshards you found dullards; a dull man is always a baleful basilisk.

I am perplexed to have your letter proffering friendship whilst you prepare in your heart a legal document designed to purloin whatever I have. As I said in my previous words to you I do not smart at the loss of possessions. Can I eat the pewter, the pottery, the chairs bought with so much tender feeling; eat them, Winifred, but in the end it will fill the gullet of Charybdis. Abstract the gold from my poor mother's blood, but it will do you no good. I am certain of that, knowing how we are tormented for our baneful acts. I shall oppose you in nothing; I am simply amazed at your fond and erring nature: you value my friendship yet you rush to lawyers to filch from me land, house, goods, — ay it is sad that you should do so. You tell me you are not avaricious! maybe not; but tell me how you spell your deeds. Have I not repeatedly told you that I had no wish to slough away any burden I owed you and our tender fleshed infants. When you wrote me the letter saying how little money you had, I had less than you, and could not then get any. Olson's wife was in the hospital and his Guggenheim dollars were not released. I had already borrowed heavily against my salary. Yet do not think it was painful to me not to be able to send you money at once. Of course, I realized you might take money from me and then jibe at me in your soul. Winifred, if you have not Clytemnestra's liver you will tread more gently upon my life. It cannot be wholly opaque to you that you kindled the greatest rages in me. It is a fine and wily subterfuge to tell lawyers, police, jackanapes, foul-livered and rank lipped dolts how cruel and

darksome and blackamoor is my soul. But what do you say to your hidden self? Did I grudge you dollars; did I spare my skin when you required protection; did I benefit in any way from your trust, a sore evil to me always? Pile on my head the plague of your own perversity, and you drop ruin upon your face. Neither you nor I can shun the fate we woo. The property you are taking perforce from me will be dust; neither you nor our hallowed children will have any benefit from it. Without my counsel the trust will moulder too. And what will happen to you, Winifred; you will cry out in your affliction for the man you now gull and despise. I beg you to do one thing; yes, get the divorce you pine for; take the belongings perforce; disport if you must with low, cankered skin. Just let me see and touch our two infants. I will clothe them and do all that I can to help you; you know I am no skinflint. Let me spend the day with Geoffrey, that is, the 28th of October; if you wish, come on the 29th, bring Joel, please, and any doughty protector you wish. If you will show some heart's civility I can relieve you of hardships and will do so freely. You can shed the bland tear upon legal shoulders, also, and make your own court-room exactions. That won't do you much good, Winifred; the houses have their dangling, taloned roots in loathly sand; I have not. However, I beg you to know that it is in my free desire to be an advantage to your life regardless of what fetters you forge on what stinking stithy of fate. That, alas, is your doing. I will not deny, that if the varlets you trust at the instant harm you, it will be grievous to me.

Naturally, I will take care of all expenses. I suggest meeting you in New York because Washington is too far; besides, I detest Massachusetts more than Poe did.

Have pity on Geoffrey and Joel; do not orphan them so long as nature does not. You know how I dote on Geoffrey; without him I walk a sundered Lucifer on asphalt and bitumen. The very little I ask you for is that benediction you must not deny our infants, some touch with the nature of their father.

I am reading constantly, Shakespeare, Josephus, Philo, Horace, a Christopher Smart translation Olson has given me, and gathering my

forces to asssault Pisgah. This time I shall see Canaan!

Will you, please, Winifred, send my overcoat and my corduroy shirts, and the books and the photographs of my mother. I asked you for these in my previous letter.

Read this epistle carefully, and see whether anything in it is not plain and straightaway. See whether I urge you to drop any action you deem a protection to yourself although you procure this by wounding my name and pressing your heel hard upon the very essence of my spirit. I want one thing: I believe the issue of Edward Dahlberg should have some palpable connection with his impalpable image. Had you been the Beatrice of my soul, you would know that every apostle of vision from the beginning of time has been roughly spat upon by the mediocre. You wanted a poet to have the easy and pliant acquiescences of the rude, the liar and the fool. Like the admiring rout we had around us; you admired my book but fled from the wisdom therein. But time will hear me out, and all the revolting dust that now wickedly lies upon my name, will go to their burial place of oblivion and Acheron filth, but my words will breathe like the Ephesian sod. I know that and need no one else save my own pulses to give me the oracular knowledge.

Take care of our beloved little stalks of innocence, and make a quiet covenant with me that will be goodly for our infants. Ask yourself, whether I ask much; remember what I have often cited from St. Shakespeare; use these lines as your aegis when you are prompted to run to evil mouths and pustular lips for a judgment of me, "Goodness and wisdom to the vile seem vile; filths but savour themselves."

EDWARD DAHLBERG

[post card, in printed script]

Dear Charles: —

Thank you very much for the Books, and for the Words: I love Both.

Soon as I have some tranquil moments, & can in some way dissolve the melancholia in my bones — ay, I am as sad as Saul, knowing not how to avert fate & Mt. Gilhoa, I will write, & earnestly thank you —

My love —
EDWARD DAHLBERG

[Hand-written, both sides of a post card] [New York City]
Oct 4, 48

My dear Charles: —

Thank you deeply for your letter. Did you mail the book, or am I to continue to be the first infidel, the alone & the dark that Adam begot before Seth. The harpy harrys, Harry Moore, Harry Bosshard (with the help of Anne, who has the glazed eyes of the rodent) are working with her. So would you, please, Charles, say that I'm living in a room in Washington should any one ask. I must keep this N.Y. residence hidden.

I could get you part-time teaching in N.Y. if you wanted it, but you would have to move with celerity. Did you send Cloutrem a letter?

I earnestly hope Constanza is much improved —

Forgive these bleak, tombed words [of ?] [?] Sam Rosenberg I think of him, his wallet as shiny as the Jade Rozinante because of me — —

Your friend,
EDWARD

It was very good of you to send the Ms. so quickly — — Thanks, thanks.

[Washington, D.C.]
Wednesday [October, 1948]

Edward:

Constanza goes now to the post office to see this off to you — yr card just came in the afternoon mail.

You are right, I probably will jump on new york like an animal. Yr address leaves me in a quandary where to send this ten dollars. I shall send it to Church St.

So do excuse these bare words — it is an act of despatch.

Love fr us both
CHARLES

[post card in printed script]

Dear Charles: 1.

My grateful appreciation for the ten dollars — I am too sundered to write you as my heart dictates. This woman has put her hece upon my spirit, it is so flattened no blood flows. Your troubles, [lov?], are another stinging defeat upon my head. Should you & Constanza wish to go to the Wellfleet house (it has an automatic oil furnace, brand new, & neither you nor I could blow it up, God or Devil-willing).

2.

I wish I could write, & assault the heavens — — All my Pulses urge me to — — but one reading of the Psalms of St. Shakespeare, "I will wrestle till my thigh is wrenched, with the Angel at Peniel — — These are blades in my throat & my pain pierces so — — — —

My love to you & Constanza
EDWARD DAHLBERG

Does Constanza know some woman who could put thru a call to Chicago from New York — — some one in New York, with vocal secretarial efficacy,

who could be representing a teacher's agency — I hope, maybe, to get Winifred's address, & see my Geoffrey! darling stalk of pulsing innocence. Please let me know by return mail, Charles — —

Your friend & Constanza's

[post card with printed script] [New York City]
still at Broadway Central Hotel

Dear Charles: —

I earnestly hope you are out of bed now; would urgently advise you not to make the journey south until you are stronger!
Professor Cargill, an admirer of "Call Me Ishmael," wants to meet you & have lunch — I'll [introduce] you when you come to N.Y. I saw a copy of the volume in a bookshop, "Call Me Ishmael" & could not resist buying it.
2. There are a few others who would like to know you. I put your book in everybody's hands.
I toil for my life, my spirit, & pray heaven, my wrath will be no less than Achilles', & my words as sharp as the Deliah Ash when I get to my book! Ay I pray, — so many of my petitions to heaven have been bootless cries. Would you, please, ask Albers to have my books, all in cartons, sent Railway Express, to me — — I have also there some clothes, a student lamp, a couple of pieces of pewter, Navajo Rugs, a hat, an aluminum spun study lamp — — I would be grateful if you could get a student to pack them very securely. Perhaps you would be good enough to see that he does. Almost everything is tied up in cartons except Friedlander's 4 volumes on Roman Manners & Habits, very scarce — —
Please send the verse as early as you can — —, take care of yourself & all love to you & Constanza — —

EDWARD DAHLBERG

You are [ ] about Sam R.

Washington
Thursday [October, 1948]

My dear Edward:

Albers has written, accepting my decision not to leave Washington this year, but inviting me to come down for a week now to lecture and give seminars. It fits, for Constance needs such a change before returning to her job, which she is now determined to do. So it looks now as though we will spend next week down there. And what I'm hoping might emerge from it is some arrangement by which I might go down there a little of each month, in such fashion to make it possible for us to get through this winter financially. I'd hazard the guess some such plan is in Albers mind. So, if you will now add your blessing to what was born in your brain in the 1st place, Black Mt may be the magic to solve what has, up to now, been a knot in which I was so bound I was unable to use my sword.

((Your mail, or messages, from you and to you, will be forwarded with ours, and I shall despatch them to you, Edward.

And do write again. Your postcard was a golden leaf in this drear fall week, and I am most anxious to have your news of the diseaseion of Farrar & Straus.

Sam grunted. (I gather he is Rosinante. The Institute don't pay, have 17,000 deficit.)

I have spent two days in Crete and Mycenae, following an Ariadne thread of my mind, and feel somewhat refreshed. But the words do not go down on paper and you know, cher maitre, what that means to such a neolith as I.

Constanza is now almost a woman again and joins me

in love,

CHARLES

[New York City]
October 9, 1948

My dear Charles:

I wish I had the grassy quiet of the early Genesis Giants. There has been word from her. A legal document which I refused came from Wareham, Mass, and that is doubtless her word and gift. It will, perhaps, now go back to Wareham, and then be mailed to Black Mountain or to you. I must keep my New York whereabouts sphynxed. It is registered and requires a return signature. Will you please handle it as skillfully as you can and send it to me so that it will not be known to her that I am in New York. There is the base problem of finding a lawyer here. I do not know to whom to go. Worst of all, my tender Geoffrey is still hidden from me, and that is "The cankerous wound that bites my flesh." If you have, Charles, any suggestions please let me know. Meanwhile, I walk a solitary Lucifer upon bitumen and asphalt.

It is a felicity to hear that you're making arrangements with Albers that will be helpful to you. I earnestly hope that Constanza will benefit by some change. Should you want me to write to Albers suggesting that you go down once a month for lectures and seminars I will do so at once.

I regret to hear that neither Sam nor his Rozinante wallet is to be fed barley, hens, or for his teaching. You were as wily as Odysseus about that school; little wonder that Roosevelt wanted to appoint you the assistant secretary of the treasury. Such exchequer olfactories!

Your judgments on the Tree are doubtless very good; the obscurity which compression brings is still unresolved. It is a fault. I have always believed that the path to perception is perception, and that all else is waste, Dead Sea prose.

The MS has not been read. Whether so small a book will entice a publisher is perhaps doubtful. I am thinking of following a suggestion you made and organically enlarging The Flea of Sodom by pilfer-

ing gnomes from the Tree. It is wholly your thought. What I will do is to fatten incident with more adages and add new ones too.

You see I write fumblingly. My letter is not sharply limned as yours. My soul and my knees are feeble, yea, as weak as the cony in the Psalms. You have now the books you need for your spirit and when you have fed upon Bashan and Carmel you will be more filled than when you wrote CALL ME ISHMAEL. So be patient; take your loaves, your timbrel and flagon of wine and go up to the Mount of God.

My head was my obsession, says Verhaeren. Mine is Geoffrey, and when I do not think of him my mind is upon my friend, Charles Olson.

Love to you and to your Constanza,

EDWARD DAHLBERG

△

Paul Blackburn

The Term

In Spain one drinks from both cups.

Split a diamond, quarter it, cut it in eighths :
the glamour of increasing surfaces.
And in getting below them
one partakes of aspects
like wounds.
The fact, the designation, are only two
ports of entry, Mister
Pythagoras.

Ulysse dixit:
"I have been to talk to Tiresias.
He said, 'Take an oar
and walk inland with it
until they think you are foolish.
Go even further
they will think it is something else.
That way you will live very long.' "

"Pero, trabajarlos, señor, no es fácil."

MEANING THE EARTH, HERSELF,
MEANING HIS OWN DAMNED TERRACES.
There was another said it to me
meaning the bulls he fought.

For the poet
each poem.

Michael Palmer

Echo

(texte antiparallèle pour Pascal Quignard)

which resounds. Re-sounds. Where first would
follow. The letter he had lost reappeared in
his palm. Identity was the cause. Not that the
word spoken had been heard. Not that a word
spoken can be seen, even partially, traced
against the screen. Language copies him in its
listening, tracing his imperfect copy. Which
re-sounds. Echoes briefly. The rustling a
wall transmits by interference. For example:
raised both arms above his head. And said:
a letter a letter can be reckoned with. Rustling
as of an article of clothing such as a dress or
green dress. An even greyness as of a page,
recording events. The subject is this, rustling
at the moment of enunciation, to be reckoned
with. Not that the words thus raised above the
head and turned into hills. Could possibly. Be
recognized in his own misunderstanding. After
the talking is done a kind of attention to each
mark, an injured identity traced against the
screen. Soweto-Miami. Cremated beside the river.

which sounds (sounded) different at night. Not
that the words reassembled among hills, exactly,

where there were none. A rustling seized him,
the history of cloth and wind, hedgerows. Or
windows above rivers, cornflowers and forget-
me-nots, an even blueness as of a page, a failure
at translation. The distant past visited and we
whispered her well. Heard prior to itself and
dressed as a shadow. Not that the words re-
sembled hills exactly, hidden among them. Soweto-
Miami as of a particular light, a quality. Hills
where there were none, only sounds. Body of per-
haps a dog, afloat, the first ten notes, major
then the minor mode. Echoes an attention.

as if preceding, preceded by, itself, depth of
the forest. The subject is this, disregarded,
story of cloth and wind or the space between
events.

misunderstood as a measure of distance. It
takes no time in that sense, repeats nothing,
figures the shape of the flames. Gesticulate.

a failure of translation. In sleep the language
he spoke was one he didn't know. Waking it
sounded the same. Waiting there it seemed a
succession of names, a level field of things in
constant motion, exchanging identities.

neither followed nor following. Two are there as
she counts to one, to one and one then three five
eight defining the spiral, to double sevens to
begin, to instauredness. Left arm and right and
the figures like the fire. There must be a

different metric, a gesture and that's all, this this and so on, concomitance, like writing but it's not a writing, the pieces actually are.

across water. Soweto-Miami with no distance, the figures the fragments of a picture. She refused the explanation before it was made. Who (previous to speaking) woke against a door. Right arm detached these past weeks, greyness modified at each stage.

This I saw and said at once.

Case where he has visions of his dead friend.

in gesturing there. The letter he had lost was the cause, an imperfect copy spoken among hills or reassembled there.

The letter he had lost was the cause, a dead friend traced against the screen. They are listening to songs while waiting for morning.

Forgetting the name as it sounds, an unknown city, the journey never begun. Letter (book) deafened by echoes, figure (form) an even greyness indicating the river.

What we call depth then, of forest, mirror, conviction etc, voiced as fake history. As morning is said to offer new hope or no hope in what must be or may have been a courtyard where photographs substitute for trees,

benches and walls, each detail perfectly reproduced from the story he was told about how it all would eventually appear. Thus the severed head is an object of polite discussion and necessary to the tableau like the polychrome statuary and exotic flora we admire more than words can say.

She claims they are trying to fuck their way into history and so to change it, and for a moment we both do and do not agree. The river in the background is muddy, the lamenting figures the same shape as the flames. The subject, disregarded, is the frequency of the oscillation, the coincidence of cloth and wind, hedgerows. She discovered the pen beneath her bed.

of interest because unspoken: to the eye over water; softly repeated; erasure in the naming; 'many-tongued'.

She discovered the pen and returned it to him.

disappeared then, leaving a voice behind unlike her own.

They do both agree and disagree, the numbers and voices projecting above the ostinato figure, violinist the father's son, lawns crisp and green, indifferent, the visible world, auricle of the ear cool, fresh, rough, succulent to the touch.

She claims they want to agree but disappear
while speaking, brief redness of history softly
repeated, the severed head a substitute for
trees intended as an aid to memory.

She claims they want to eliminate history, legs
turned to smoke, carriage passing a row of
columns said to be endless because it does end.

A very narrow but not very tall glass-domed
house with two entrances. Nodded as if she be-
lieved what I'd said, carriage rocking on its
worn springs, a constant trembling.

So it is equivocal and precedes its beginning.

I over there, he-she here, table and lamp.

is brought forward from, toward the eye. Water's
moment as of blocks, uninvited, a one-hinged
sound that sleep recited, what he was of, half-
yellowed now by leaves, as of blocks carved
clumsily and set afloat, stairs cast in dark-
ness, curtain held tightly shut then drawn a
little apart, a redness to history reflected
wherever words might turn to talk and tell of
a mirrored door.

which to be so must remain closed?

and so and so. He told her what she'd once
told him.

Dear Janet, When I want to get away from it all
I pick up one of your novels and—presto—
mission accomplished!

Whether dreaming is thinking about something.
Whether the eyelids moving are seeing.

which to be so must remain closed?

naked to waist with back turned, arms enfolding
head, world large by lamplight rolling us even
in sleep, a redness to the story they'd been
told.

He painted her beside herself as a likeness,
and each face seemed identical with the one they
had known.

She claims they are trying to erase the story by
repeating it exactly as it was told. Thus clema-
tis, tea, rhubarb, Indian fig, water and its
cognates, of worlds twice seven, wheat and corn.
Thus table and lamp (or desk and light), sheets
(or leaves), wordless talk, gestural dreams
empty of meaning, palms in paramuthetic wind.
This with my own words she told him.

And told him again.

Echo

(alternate text)

The two poles. We didn't disagree
that meetings should be begun

upon our foreheads—slender
memories had been put to death

in the proper style, encounters
with forests, mountains

and fields, creatures returning
from islanded sleep

said nothing
nervous and unattended

as we wept. This habit of yellow paper
is recent and without effect

upon our foreheads—slender
runners outstripped them

and said nothing
as we wept. What

time of day now
might say differently

'this weapon is invisible,' or
this name so pronounced

with lips inconceivably apart
has been lost

within its sound,
might then among the *llaneros*

recite tales of night rides
that take no time

or nothing if not time
to tell. Visitors gathered there to hear

it said—backward
it's true—that

he and she were
this and this, not

any one shade exactly
not any one thing

outlined by its clarity
against the milky glass.

At a given moment lovers pass
in complicated hats

the wind will later take back.
The bedstead is iron, with-

out ornament and not mine. Its
fading is what recalls it

to them, an imaging of the rings
of fractured ice

coating volute and column
overhead. Yet some of those

paths were like maps, green
for no reason, pale

orange where no one had been.
Knowledge is empty claimed the swaying bridge.

She recognised the voice as her own
resounding in the damp hall

though the rest,
what the words now said

again and again,
seemed entirely different.

Echo

(a commentary)

which in a dry season might
begin or might precede its
beginning with a list
of truths self-evident: these
clouds (these crowds) you
now see are permanent
and fixed; the arboreal splendor, the
meadows and chalk cliffs
are artificial, devised
of wired concrete and paint
by a developer in the forties
and therefore beautiful; he took
three breaths for every one of hers;
the sun's chariot hurried backward
in its path to a point
exactly overhead and two months before;
the child had trouble speaking;
war was once again in the air;
the space program was to blame for the
snow; nervous
brides waved
weapons in the air; passions
and sensations succeed each other; I
stumbled; I recognised Bugs Bunny;

the darker one had not yet
closed her eyes; weight of a mass
of fair hair; below
a certain temperature the pen
would not write; below
them lay a square
filled with soldiers and statues;
the road north from the city
parallels the river; some
laughed and turned their backs;
enclosed were seven songs;
the letters grew bolder;
heat, cold, light, shade;
the key broke off in his hand;
they lived beneath the streets
to evade certain death; the name
began with a *L* or possibly an *R;*
he scored the loaf at each day's portion;
the distribution of brightness oscillates;
bells mark points in space;
an odor of sulphur penetrated the room
though the windows had been carefully sealed;
one could see the outline of a movement
there; was I the source of such dreams
without meaning; actual
dancers traced against the ceiling;
a bluish violet; echoes
as of such voices
which once had claimed to be real;
a city then they would later imagine
pendant to the west like a jet bead
except empty; the rose she called *cette*
apparition sanglante, cette image;

the apple falls straight down
injuring thousands; we mounted the scaffold
at his unspoken invitation;
a liquid darkness there;
figures lost among the bands of light
came slowly forward; a duplicate
of herself encountered in passing
nodded and disappeared; it remains
visible above the narrow shore;
they are visible against the shore;
the forgotten word for waves; hazelnut
and monkey-flower; the key first
spoken of; wide azure borders.

△

Clayton Eshleman

The Loaded Sleeve of Hades

There is in you someone
who does not care about anyone,
whose ant-eater head vacuums about in the night
ingesting whatever ideology
is thrust up its labyrinthine nose—
this someone must be over 100,000 years old,
for Neanderthal began to care
strewing his dead with bachelor's button,
hollyhock and grape hyacinth.
And did you know that caves are warehouses
in which the ghosts of winds that first
investigated the pre-Cambrian earth
are also stored, so that Les Trois Frères,
coiled in tattooed splendor,
molecularly licking, still today,
its paleolithic wounds, is affectionate,
exuberant and lethal all at once—
there is, thus, through you,
a tunnel that winds back into total discontinuity
which you tried to conceal
with the physical innocence that taking on the underworld
would not have repercussions.

You find yourself, at last,
as if it were a blessing, blocked by nature,
as a new plan is blocked out,

attacked by a cave because you
got too close to the Hades-Dionysus
hinged appetite. Once crushed off the stem,
Dionysus runs Hades' empty sleeve,
you might say: they shake sleeves
to become one loaded sleeve,
a tunnel in which death is exuberance
nipped your anklebone,
weakened it just enough to send
15 minutes later
a cramp into your calf,
you lost control.

Your fracture is a fleck
amidst global enigmatic fractions,
it is nothing and it is a headlight
frozen in a ditch, Hades' loaded
empty sleeve, and the depth of your life is nothing
if severed from the life of a man in rags
going off into the dark of Siberian cold.

This life that you experience as a once,
as if it were a very fine thread
disappearing into mist at both ends . . .
suppose it were dotted at both ends,
slightly beyond what you can see,
suppose the dots led off to other threads
and that your are perforatedly connected
vastly beyond what you experience . . .
suppose at this point I qualify the metaphor
so that you do not think that you are merely
spun out of something that lives off you
(though this may possibly be true),

and imagine your origin as that which also
travels through you, so that you are both
result and process—and if you lived
having died
while dying, could that modulate,
even control a bit, this man-damned soul-making?
Is it because you look into the mist at both ends,
certain that they represent birth and death,
that you forget so much?
That forgetting itself is a mist
in which your cancerous secrecy proliferates,
intoxicated by the thrill that comes from feeling
cut off, omnipotent, and immaculate?

Seeing how close you came to Never
you might draw Always a bit closer,
and beg it not to hide its head under its cloak—
coaxed out, would its face be hairy, yes,
and pillar-like, it would be before image,
unlike Never, which is beyond image,
a faceless face. Always
curls up under Never's tail
and manages to nurse, sending up its aniline
rodent tongue into Never's pouch of stories,
there it fishes about, like a word
inside its etymological compost.

And so the poem that is pure desire
for a poem begins to accumulate—
in desire's womb there is only expectancy
for the face and fingers to pry at cervix,
it is too much, this creature will say,
to live outside desire, and so

through the entire pleistocene toward you
I have crawled, that desire can
again be world birth death dense.
And exactly what have you crawled to, desire,
your desire was wondering . . .
but now that there is no light anymore
but no total dark either,
the hospital room fans out and out across itself
and like a fan contracts,
so that you are closed and opened
in the multiple ambivalence of your fracture,
and no resolution is sincere.

△

Olana

or The Shark of Craving

I. Zamindar

Of all agenda not mechanic
mine is critical as any.
Starting out from Cordoba
as tingling signals
mint snakes
as I do,
Ida,
here.
Purple water of the rotten grapes.
Plotted chance meetings define the novel,
lovers,
novel lovers.
De novo.
Great Ida will reappear
man-mountain,
when you bang a rite.
In the conduit walk east.
Beacons of prana
move up and down
in my feeling
as I sit in siddhasan.
In Cordoba the Arabs
tickle European testicles.

Like limitations, my life,
painting one flower all life long
concealing real infractions in
benign aggression

taking advantage of steam.
Selah.
Like limitation,
seemed unlimited
the seed
inward so,
what *they* called dream
or dream
or dream retreat.
My forest.
After dhanur,
utthita kumarasan.
I swallowed the personal key
It has dissolved.
Smart dope and I distinguish,
TAKING ADVANTAGE OF STEAM
the funeral amulet:
say Zu Zu to the grocery boy!
A cacophone: cordoba shit.
Crumpled ferns for feet
the juice that shrinks
even at even tide.
Ataraxia my sister . . .
I gather the taxes due reality.

Artaxerxes the brother lost
because never known
spiralled down a time
I never shunned,
not spanned,

the twin I missed,
semblable abrazero!

The wish to be cowboy,
devotee,
and zamindar.

II. Hot Breeze and Blue Moon

the shivering milk
plush faces
made of beds
the Five-M Company
entered the banquet

Ida pirouettes, a jumpy kid

compulsive rectangles arise

I lick the semiologic ice cream cone
divine.

Transparent as an upchucked butterfly
the lamination held,
gone buffalo,
in heaven as a toothbrush.
Who is steering anyone?

She drank Blue Moon,
gnawed a pomegranate,
Persephone,

then danced the Cassava
to Mambo Mania,
loins like a brooding cloud.

What houngan wears "Cherchez la Femme"
as wheat scoundrels chew their nails
and masturbate racemes of light.

Bluehaired dragonettes
unveiled the registers,
some chophouse!
where a stingy demiurge
dropped the sugar cubes.

Cones impact. Ice cream skull crack.

Old anise drugstore cycled into whiteness of
Hollywood too long gone in memories of tigers,
harp concertos,
supple long-haired Holland boys

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF STEAM
hitting Orion highs
you rock the course
until it juices
like a splitting box.
These fangs could do you anything.

I slept in the tree of Samkhya

after filming the stars
La Féerie Orientale.

Stamped to see the butterfly,
who did?
In the stone orchards of memory
his young voice rang out,
"Breathe, don't forget to breathe."

Concentered,
of pineapple throat,
what melodies?
Glowing, having fixed up
ecstasy,
one boy came quickly in the sink,
as mint snakes wriggled there.
"Severo, my love," another moaned,
"and Vladimir. . ."

Let's ooze. Lotus lay. Ida's back.

immense dropping glitter stalk

Bhang trees, bhang fruit,
coot walk, cut. No cat,
or outis, soham.

Coin your catchwords, cunt.

Eat, eat, my kind real god

gold weathercock, you boy!

This apple is to fly.
Behold the great empty beauty of intractable being!

To be is not to what you think I say
was saying
just now
NOW

III.

Taking advantage of steam
this cantata is for potentates!
A coda of mistletoe come.
Oblate spheroids, boys!
Ida, goddess, mint julep is my name,
in Olana ashram as here,

To be is not not-not what you think
I wasn't saying, now not

just

now!

△

Mary Caponegro

Three pieces from Microfictions

CANDIDATE

I've filed so many letters of introduction into the bathroom hamper it begins to smell that sweaty cumulative smell, though a recommendation from you, who knows; might make all the difference.

MARRIAGE

In this composition, notice the interruptions. It seems that what had been interrupted becomes the interruption, and what had been the interruption becomes the theme. The hard thing is to bring out all the voices. The hard thing is to hear them all at once.

CICADA

Cat slowly ate it continued to buzz the solidarity of all from each inside their cacophonic density shriller focus right behind her whistle man who wouldn't stop got off the train and followed her.

△

Jonathan Williams

In Marsden Hartley's Hand

happily contented
to be climbing the heights and the clouds
by the brush method

•

they
have to
come of
themselves

•

place me in the middle
between these lovers of mine
and there you have us

•

goldenglories
of my heart's gate

•

I see
the mail carrier
coming down
the field

•

I know
what I see

•

to walk on

throughout the exquisite days
with you

enough that you
call me brother,
friend, lover

•

a kiss
to you
across
these
isolated hills

•

one can't have all
things in the hills

yet I found your letter
here in the hills

•

better
to be walking about
with new young stars
in one's hand
than fumbling over
old meteors

•

a big broad shoulder
to brush by . . . .

the flicker
of the yellow butterfly . . . .

•

somehow
this business of one
isn't big enough

•

love again,
always love

Diane Wakoski

Why I Am A Poet Not A Painter

with apologies to Frank O'Hara

For years I have been troubled by a very strong intuitive response to natural landscape. It is a double response, for I do *see the scene I am looking at as a painting (one already painted), and at the same time I involuntarily think, and feel a strong emotion as I am thinking this, "I wish I were a painter."*

No ideas
but in things? But then,
why do I want
to paint this world today? A thaw in our
egret landscape
and then fast freeze,
this morning
each tree etched with frost.
My holly plant
sitting on the steps in its inadequate pot
shows each leaf outlined in crystal
and the bare
forsythia bushes wave thin ice-crusted
twigs. What ideas come to me
seeing this world?
None.
But I want to paint it, so I call home
after a walk to my office
and tell my husband
he should photograph it.

Why?

Too easy to say
it won't be that way tomorrow. If I
wanted to hold the image,
why didn't I stay outdoors
looking at it all day? I had
nothing
better to do. But I went inside and
buried myself in a book.
This
has been true
each time
I have seen something
I wanted to paint:
    the plantation oaks on Jekyl Island
    the curving cliffs at Laguna Beach
    the fog beach canyons
    autumn in the Blue Ridge Mountains
I almost get shorthand messages now
from my brain/ "I wish I were a painter. I'd paint that scene."
and "Therefore you don't need to look at it very long."

Do I want to paint it because that
would force me to set up my easel
and sit for a long time looking at the scene?
Why don't I simply sit and look at something I find beautiful?

What does beauty in my eye
do to me?
        The carbon cave
        soots my eyes. Oh, John Dunn, my opthamologist,
        surely you represent
        clear vision.
        What else is poetry? But looking down

the labyrinth to a California past
shows me the darkness of sex
Is it possible
to plant a garden
and not see the ground open up?
The wasp which has been flying around in my bedroom
now clings to the window's cold,
scarcely moves, but in the ground
swollen with white kernel
is an old civilization.

I am looking at some cuttings of
a velvet plant, in a fat green bottle
which once held framboise.
Their curving leaves, like arrowheads,
are glowing magenta in the afternoon sun, their
delicate princess hair roots, fine and white
almost filling the bottle, beginning
to curl around its bottom.

The glow of the soft leaves
reminds me of all the beauty I would like to paint.
How much I prefer a tree, this huge fig plant,
a night-blooming cereus which has never bloomed
reaching long fleshy fingers into today's sunshine, the
bristly spruces which each clump of needles
outlines by ice.

The humanform is one I wish I did not possess.
Dapne, you were not punished.
Narcissus, none of you.
How much I would rather be
a plant
than what I am.

Is this why I wish I were a painter?
For it is a painter of landscapes
and of still lives I would be.
Humans and animals
so trivial, uninteresting. But water lilies
yes, or Stevens' "junipers shagged with ice"
Does this explain why
some few ones
of us
who live in apartments
read the Burpee and other seed
catalogues?
Or why I, who once cared everything
for egg beauty
& the passionate life
now prefer
still lives,
the bloom of plant life
a world where desire has been eliminated/

1981

△

Jed Rasula

Four Poems

difficult to pour the months from a silver beaker,
retrieve the alembic in unbaked silt,
part the cloak, split the speckled bamboo—

the monkey watches a frog on his lotus pad:
all the sky snugged close to the breathing green body

man's heart patting his music by the strings
rising up thru braided mountain woods

Red Pine Drifting Ridge Vast Cliff

wrists he touches

the finger stops hold nature's pressures up
to fit in the air transparent condensed opacity
lighted orchids, begonias, wooding the hill
his mouth gone into the turtle & geese nearby
flying overhead, older by another year
brightness like a moon thru the radical clouds

mind the Radius of the Thousand Measures
hooped in one posture
filming the cloth of speech it emits
brisk tones grown from bowels' notice
otherwise simply balconies, landings, platforms'
  sun-warmed boards
    whose stones were dreams
or where it fits in dream is stone

a gate the autumn

pours from trees

river in the wirst

contentment

moon a stem of ash
growing in its crest
an inch of grass in the heart
such as daffodils
& other garden's queries sheared
are ears across all sound?
or sleeping thaw?
who knows where to heal?

whatever stranger matter brightens out odor thru passing

Kirke

in her pharmacy:
jars & vials of truth
from which the yolks have been removed

the doomed enchanted voices of her men
condensing on the dripper

—her water clock
guiding pleasures into vessels,
eggs in hallways opening
showing more hallways, passages, eggs, blades

rooms, chambers, shuttered with drapes
poisoned phrases folded in the hanging cloth
startled snouts nudge out thru peeking at the witch

* * *

the secret of the glass
is metabolism

the philosopher of glass
lights up the ramp with bees

fuzzy melon-bodies erotic & sticky
feeding on secret views
at rage in sexual labor
knitted like the brow of eros
a shrill magical pucker
Elpenor licked from her jug
falling off her roof at the roaring margin of Ocean
shattering one of her vases as he fell
through the radical siren curtain
to Hades,
Lord of Startled Hearts

△

Rachel Blau DuPlessis

Eclogue

Gave me the milk
curdling
sour-soft scum naked
water
light and
glittering where I am
folded roads.

Gave the bread
honeyed,
gold fulls
the woolly
cells of yeast.

Mouth to the earth
takes earth,
to water,
water

mouth to the green
eats
top and tuft and danky dirt

mouth to the wet bud
pool drinks hard

kissing the fallen leaves aside
o'er green fat hills,
heart
snaked round the pearly
membrane of day.
O honey hills a hole a spring.

Heigh ho silly
sheep. Leap!

onto the green and moody
pastures
over the green and seedy
grasses

that be

everywhere
that earth-laden shadows
bride and bridegroom
keep
their swaddled flocks.

Killing Me

I had a dream I killed you
before death's deep doorway.

You sought to kill me
at the dream-naked doorway?

Lightly lifted sleep-laden
arms long and small

and wreathed you
sweetly, fleeing

bright heavy danger
bread and breast to breast.

Why killeth she me to get
this doorway?

Who skulks
on the pink limen of the dawnway?

No murder;
I am worth your killing:

I would kill myself
to stand at the threshold

under the lintel
naked foot stalking

on the packed ground of this place
the clay ground of this thresher's place

and beat the hard bread grains
burst from the baskety grasses.

△

Billie Chernicoff

Corona

1. A creature
who tells things
otherwise I am
only movies
projected
from up there
by nothing so risky
as angels
but the older
greek ones
who have being
to confer realness
or weave a crown
of thin air
for love, to provide
matter to stay
the mystery, release
ourselves into its
specific cells
the crown weaving
life of the mind
telling each cell
it is a door.

2. For the old ones
Zeus & Hera
we are movies
on the snow
we are the mystery
of words, luminous
independent as we build
our wars or cities
we are starlets
they think our trouble
is stunning.

3. Are we the children
of their weird couplings
when they came down
as swans & vampires & moths
risking their wings against
our screens we thought
they were dreams
some god seed mixed
in our subtle blood
if we are not the words
there is no story
we don't stumble to tell
with our mortal heel
hand word shoulder.

4. The page has two silences
so close & different
they might be god.
If the left margin is Vesta
the hearth is not easy
or even warm but the flame

is every day we go down
on the stone, cup our hands
around & with our breath
the phoenix leaps
as a heart into.

Is the far margin
Christ the lover described
by everything unsung, the perfect
embrace of everything other
touching, sometimes I leap back
as if in fear of
that white fire.

5. I am afraid to say these things.
In the back yard all the peaches
are ripe at once.

6. They are so clear
in themselves, glossed
with such new & local
pleasure, the machines
are faces, they behave
what they are taught.
I love when if seldom
the engines break down
in our naked disobedient
different faces.

7. Where the trees
& rains of our bodies
seem to want to be rescued
from the old texts
& back yards of repetition
the way we would
lie down in snow
to make angels
to carve a place
for their wings we flap
our arms & trust
only the cold
patient beauty
of forms
to call them.

△

Aimé Césaire

Batouque

—translated by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith

The rice fields of cigarette butts of spit on the strange
summons
of my simplicity are tattooing themselves with peaks.
Floodgate open, the words perforated in my saliva
resurface as cities, paler above the suburbs
O the transparent cities mounted on yaks
slow blood pissing the last memory into filigreed leaves
the boulevard bruised comet brusque crossed bird
strikes itself right in the sky
drowned in arrows
It's my kind of night most hollow and most null
a fan of compass fingers collapsed into the white laughter
of sleeps.

batouque
once the world is naked and russet
like a womb burned to a cinder by the great suns of love
batouque
once the world is without inquest
a wondrous heart where the scenery of glances
splintered to bits for the first time is
embossed

once the attractions entrap the stars
once love and death are
a single coral snake resoldered around a gemless arm
without soot
without defense

batouque of the river swollen with crocodile tears and
drifting whips
batouque of the tree with the serpents of the dancers of
the prairie
Pennsylvania roses peep at the eyes at the nose at the ears
at the windows of the tortured man's
sawed head
batouque of the woman with arms made of sea her hair an
underwater source
rigor-mortis turns bodies into
tears of steel
all the leafy phasmas make a sea of blue yuccas and rafts
all the neurotic phantasms have taken the bit between their
teeth

batouque
once the world abstraction now seduced
is made of shoots of rock salt
the gardens of the sea
for the first and the last time
the mast of a forgotten caravel blazes an almond tree in the
wreckage
a coco palm a baobab a sheet of paper
the dismissal of an appeal
batouque
once the world is a strip mine
once the world from the height of the upper bridge is
my desire

your desire
conjugated in a leap into the inhaled void
under the awning of our eyes unfurls
all the sundust thronged with parachutes
with deliberate fires with oriflammes of red wheat
batouque of rotted eyes
batouque of molasses eyes
batouque of a doleful sea encrusted with islands
the Congo is a leap of sun lifting at the end of a line
a pail of bloody cities
a tuft of citronella in the night at bay
batouque
once the world is a tower of silence
when we are prey and vulture
all the rains of parrots
all the resignations of chinchillas
batouque of broken trumpets of the oily eyelid of virulent plovers
batouque of the rain killed split finely by reddened ears
purulence and vigilance

having raped to the point of transparence the narrow sex of the dusk
the tall Negro of the morning
to the depths of the cracked stone sea
takes on the hunger fruit of knotted cities
batouque
Oh! over the intimate void
—squirted squirting—
until this site is enraged
the injunctions of a severe blood!
and the ship flew over the crater at the very threshold of the eagle plowed hour
the ship walked in calm boots of shooting stars

in wild boots of chopped off wharves and dress-armor
and the ship let fly a volley of mice
of telegrams of cowries of houris
a Wolof dancer was dancing on points and signaling
from the point of the highest mast
all night long he was seen dancing laden with amulets and
alcohol
bounding to the level of the fattened stars
an army of ravens
an army of knives
an army of parabolas
and the arched ship let fly an army of horses
At midnight the earth entered the channel of the crater
and the diamond wind hung with red cassocks
out of oblivion
blew horse hooves singing the adventure of milky voiced
death
over the gardens of the carob planted rainbow

batouque
once the world is a breeding-pond where I angle for my eyes
on the line of your eyes
batouque
once the world is the far-sailing latex drunk from the flesh
of sleep
batouque
batouque of swells and hiccups
batouque of sneered sobs
batouque of startled bison
batouque of defiances of carmined wasp nests

in the pilfering of the fire and the smoking sky
batouque of hands
batouque of breasts

batouque of the seven beheadly sins
batouque of the sex with a bird-like peck a fish-like flight
batouque of a black princess in a tiara of melting sun
batouque of the princess stoking up a thousand unknown
guardians
a thousand gardens forgotten under the sand and the rainbow
batouque of the princess with thighs like the Congo
like Borneo
like Casamance

batouque of night without a pit
of night without lips
cravatted by the spurt of my nameless slave-galley
by my boomerang bird
I hurled my eyes into the rolling into the guinea of despair
and death
all strangeness solidifies Easter Island Easter Island
all strangeness cut by the cavalries of darkness
a fresh brook flows in my hand a sargasso of melted screams

And the stripped-down ship dug my thirst-for-branches-
minaret-exile
out of the brain of stubborn nights
batouque
the currents churned wisps of silver sabers
and nausea spoons
and the wind pierced by the fingers of the SUN
sheared with fire the armpit of foam haired islands

batouque of pregnant lands
batouque of an enwalled sea
batouque of humped villages of rotten feet of deaths spelled
out in the priceless despair of memory
Basse-Pointe Diamant Tartane and Caravelle

gold shekels scrapers of floatings assailed by sheaves and
corn-cockles
sad brains crawled by orgasms
smoky armadillos
O the krumen teasers of my helm!
the sun has leapt from the great marsupial pouches of the
dormerless sea
into the full algebra of false hair and tramwayless rails
batouque the rivers fissure in the unlaced helmet of ravines
the sugar cane capsizes in the rolling of the earth swollen
with she-camel humps
the bays smash at the ebbless bladders of stone with irre-
sponsible lights

sun, go for their throats!
black howler black butcher black corsair batouque bedecked
with spices and flies
Sleepy herd of mares under the bamboo thicket
bleed bleed herd of carambas.

Assassin I acquit you in the name of rape.
I acquit you in the name of the Holy Ghost
I acquit you with my salamander hands
the day will pass like a wave with its bandoleer of cities
in its beggar's sack of powder-swollen shells

Sun sun russet serpent-eater leaning on my trances of
a swamp in labor
the river of grass snakes that I call my veins
The river of battlements that I call my blood
the river of assagais that men call my face
the river of walking around the world
shall strike the Artesian rock with a hundred monsoon stars

Liberty my only pirate water of the Ninth Year my only thirst
love my only sampan
we shall slip our calabash fingers of laughter
between the icy teeth of the Sleeping Beauty.

[Note on the Césaire poem:]

"Batouque" is from *Les armes miraculeuses* (1946); our translation is based on the considerably modified definitive version of the poem as it appeared in Césaire's *Oeuvres complètes* (1976). According to Lilyan Kesteloot, the title is "the rhythm of a Brazilian dance of African origins." "kruman" (for some reason not capitalized by Césaire), refers to an indigenous Liberian Black people, noted for skill as boatmen.

△

Alan Williamson

Art Roman

(Autun, December; Poitou-Charente, July)

The angel wakes us to the star an inch
beyond our heads,
where we sleep, even if we are kings, all under
one cloak . . .

As from the Roman wish to close a gate
on the forest night, *oppidum*
—we skidded down
the ice-slick hill to see unearthly, shouldering
up from three-story houses—

there comes the arch and weightiness of God;
so from God this endless
actionless itch to know
ourselves more real?—where we go, half-bent, under
the wind from inside the atom
(and still
they hang a boar by the heels, for the year's turning,
in the butcher's doorway)—

And, over us, the saved,
come from the year's charmed round
of stars and labors, stand
still, with a child's small smile and even locks

for the wind to lift like hay,
and climb like children through the complicated
frail balconies, needing
a boost to the buttocks from the angel standing
below;
while, opposite, the damned
discover everywhere mouths: a devil howling
to find his hand has clubbed into a crab . . .

But what does God see? This rictus facing nothing
in the scene that ends all things . . .
Only
the cancelling-out of justice? Dante would say
He looks into Himself and there sees everything,
as everything, when it looks in love, sees Him—

a dance on a pinhead!

—though west and south,
in summer, toward the Cathar kingdoms,
everything divides, everything swallows everything
and lives inside it: the dancers' two
swivelling bodies meet in one head; the lion's
tail is also, seen closely, the crying woman's
arm . . .
and for an hour
one believes Dante, in the too tall grass.

△

BOOK REVIEWS

Sunrise. FREDERICK SEIDEL.
Penguin/Viking. 1980.

by ELIOT WEINBERGER

So what's a guy like me doing with a book like that in a place like this?

Well . . . Frederick Seidel is our latest most important American poet. *Sunrise*, 17 years in the making, smartly published by Penguin/Viking, is the 1979 Lamont Poetry Selection and the winner of the 1980 National Book Critics Circle Award (now second in prestige to the Pulitzer). Robert Lowell wrote in 1963: "When I read him, I have envious, delighted, jolted feelings and suspect the possibilities of modern poetry have been changed." Richard Poirier compares Seidel to Lawrence, calling *Sunrise* one of the best poetry books of the last decade or more. Jerome Mazzaro reveals in the *Hudson Review* that "Seidel has the power to be an important visionary." And Denis Donghue, moony in the *N. Y. Review of Books*, is reminded of—needless to say—Yeats and Lowell. In other words, it is likely that few, if any, *Sulfur* subscribers have read the man.

One effect of the poetry pandemic has surely been the elimination of exogamous reading. It has become so hectic in one's own longhouse that one rarely has the time or stamina for visits to the other clans. Twenty years ago, in the ardent days of the anthology battles, even diehard Beat or Black Mountain partisans could, at the least, recognize the insignia of the opposing troops (double initials always made an easy target). Today, who among *Sulfur* readers (which I take as the progressive, but not radical, flank) can spot the ear of Alfred Corn, or distinguish between Howard and Stanley Mosses? Who among us *doesn't* think that a "line of Dubie's" refers to Frank Sinatra?

I, for one, read contemporary American poetry every day, receive a score of poetry books and periodicals every week, yet rarely engage any book of poetry published by a major house or as part of a university press poetry series (excepting selected/collected editions of the old or dead); any poetry book

that wins a major prize, or any literary periodical with the word "Review" in the title. (Nor, I hasten to add, do I exclusively linger in that church bake-sale ozone where all the presses are named after exotic flora or common fauna.) Consequently, I am not only ignorant of 80 percent of the poets discussed at the moment by scholars, wits and literati, I am utterly mystified by the mechanics of current "establishment" taste—the grounds, say, for the inclusion or exclusion of any poem in or from any Review. This despite the fact—which we never admit—that on the whole the academic reviewers and critics are far better writers and far more informed than the average fellow traveler of those who make it new.

And so adrift with my nearly blank map of American poetry, I happened to read a review of Seidel's *Sunrise* by Vernon Young in the *N.Y. Times Book Review.* Seidel was unknown to me, but I recognized Young as a "frequent critic." Although, for reasons of health, the NYTBR is best avoided, Young's piece caught my eye. Seidel's poems, he wrote, "were the best about hell written in this country;" "urbane, scathing, frenetic;" "his visionary glimpses are balefully superb;" "compelling" and so on. In support, he produced two passages from the book. The first, about Osip Mandelstam:

> He was last seen alive
> In 1938 at a transit camp near Vladivostok
> Eating from a garbage pile,
> When I was two, and Robert Lowell was twenty-one,
> Who much later would translate Mandelstam,
> And now has been dead two years himself.

And the second:

> Antonioni walks in the desert shooting
> *Zabriskie Point.* He does not perspire
> Because it is dry. His twill trousers stay pressed,
> He wears desert boots and a viewfinder,
> He has a profile he could shave with, sharp
> And meek, like the eyesight of the deaf,
> With which he is trying to find America.

These two excerpts struck me as not merely dull, but so spectacularly bad that I wondered what aesthetic could prize (literally, as it turned out) such

work? What boat had I missed? I bought the book.

Seidel in *Sulfur* should, in fairness, be presented, not described—it's all too easy to sniff in dismissal or lower the heavy artillery. So instead of sitting duck, I offer "Pressed Duck", a poem in its entirety from the collection.

> Caneton à la presse at the now extinct Café Chauveron.
> Chauveron himself cooking, fussed
> And approved
> Behind Elaine, whose party it was;
> Whose own restaurant would be famous soon.
>
> Poised and hard, but dreaming and innocent—
> Like the last Romanovs—spring buds at thirty, at thirty-two,
> We were green as grapes,
> A cluster of February birthdays,
> All "Elaine's" regulars.
>
> Donald, Elaine's then-partner,
> His then-wife, a lovely girl; Johnny
> Greco, Richardson, Elaine, my former wife, myself:
> With one exception, born within a few days and years
> Of one another.
>
> Not too long before thirty had been old,
> But we were young—still slender, with one exception,
> Heads and necks delicate
> As a sea horse,
> Elegant and guileless
>
> Above our English clothes
> And Cartier watches, which ten years later shopgirls
> And Bloomingdale's fairies would wear,
> And the people who pronounce chic *chick*.
> Chauveron cut
>
> The wine-red meat off the carcasses.
> His duck press was the only one in New York.
> He stirred brandy into the blood
> While we watched. Elaine said, "Why do we need anybody else?
> We're the world."

[Now readers who do not happen to live on the island of Manhattan south of 96th Street will undoubtedly require some annotation. Elaine is the proprietor of Elaine's, a restaurant patronized by wealthy demi-intellectuals ("anti-Establishment" Hollywood directors, authors of "serious" bestsellers, et al.). Elaine herself is well known both for her extreme snobbishness and her corpulence (i.e., the "one exception"). Cartier is, of course, one of the world's most elegant jewellers; Bloomingdale's, outwardly a department store, should be considered the Main Temple of the local consumer cult. A few years ago pressed duck became the rage, following a full-page article in the *N. Y. Times*; there was a run on duck-presses at $500 apiece. One of the functions of the poem is to inform us that the poet was there first. It should also be noted that stanza 5 is not only snide, it is inaccurate: no shopgirl could possibly afford a Cartier watch, and no one on the island in recent memory has been heard to mispronounce a word which, in frequency of local usage, is second only to the first person pronoun (possessive case).]

Kindly souls might suspect that "Pressed Duck" is supposed to be funny, or ironic. It is not. He means it. For "Pressed Duck" is surrounded by 30 other poems of similar ilk, in a book dedicated to Bernardo Bertolucci: poems about partying with the Kennedys and Francis Bacon and Antonioni and apparently famous racecar drivers; images of opium by the pool, Courrèges boots, *cuisine minceur*, Mercedes limos, skin-tight leather, hand-made suits, Dom Perignon and Polaroid and Valium and Mao. There is a poem called "Fucking"; poems that end with one-line stanzas like "Good-bye." or "That is the poem."; and lines like "That is as sensitive as the future gets." or "Between his name and néant are his eyes." or "There and beyond one like heaven, as Che is."

When Seidel is trying to be funny, he sounds like this (the poem is about the author):

> He sucked his pipe. He skied he fished he published.
> He fucked his wife's friends. Touching himself he murmured
> He was not fit to touch his wife's hem.
> He dreamed of running away with his sister-in-law!
> Of doing a screenplay. Him the guest on a talk show—

When he is serious, like this (on Robert Kennedy):

Younger brother of a murdered president,
Senator and candidate for president;
Shy, compassionate and fierce
Like a figure out of Yeats;
The only politician I have loved . . .

And mainly like this:

It was Union Square. I remember. Turn a corner
And in a light year
She'd have arrived
At the nearby inky, thinky offices of *Partisan Review.*
Was she off to see my rival Lief,
Boyfriend of girls and men, who cruised
In a Rolls convertible?

This is news that doesn't stay news with a vengeance; it may be the invention of disposable poetry. It is the least numinous poetry I've ever read, a poetry obsessed with dates and the ages of individuals, with the objects of fashion which the poet accepts literally and absolutely. It is the poetry of a millesecond in an accelerating historical time, a fear and denial of cosmogonic time.

As such, the poetry has appeal to the bicoastal upper-middle brow. (Even the book itself is designed to look tony in a high-tech interior.) Small wonder that book reviewers, whose words live less than a day, love it. But why is Academia bathed in the light of *Sunrise*? Why would a man like Donaghue mistake "Pressed Duck" for "Leda and the Swan"?

First, the book is not only not campy (which might have saved it), it is deeply humorless, therefore serious. Second, Seidel's stylistic models are clearly Lowell and, especially in the 14-page incomprehensible (Young: "enigmatic") title poem, Ashbery. What *Sunrise* offers, then, is some easily recognized gossip and glitz couched in the current academic mode. In short, perfect Leisure Reading for the English Department, or down at the inky thinky *Partisan Review.*

Brancusi called Wagner's music a beefsteak in delirium; Seidel's poetry is a quiche on quaaludes. Back at the dinky but kinky *Sulfur*, all I can do is nod out as the sun sets on American taste. △

Charles Olson & Robert Creeley: The Complete Correspondence, Vols. 1 and 2. Edited by GEORGE F. BUTTERICK. Black Sparrow Press, 1980.

by MICHAEL DAVIDSON

and if I have a car, where is
Littleton? how far, from
Gloucester?

Lines from a letter, yet so much the voice of Maximus. They concern Olson's desire to meet Creeley face to face, having corresponded with him at a furious rate for a scant month. The two were not to meet for another four years (at Black Mountain), but in the meantime they created a personal and artistic relationship through letters—these written with such beauty and power that they constitute a virtual collaborative work in themselves. Each writer found in the other a sympathetic ear for new ideas about poetic form and method, not to mention a mutual disdain for the official literary establishment as characterized by the *Partisan Review*, the Auden-Spender circle or Eliot's cultural criticism. Each seemed breathlessly impatient to try out the possible "casts or methods" which might lead to a new poetics—like these notes by Creeley on myth:

> Anyhow, form has now become so useless a term/that I blush to use it. I wd imply a little of Stevens' use (the things created *in* a poem and existing there. . .) & too, go over into: the possible casts or methods for a way into/a 'subject': to make it clear: that form is never more than an *extension* of content. An enacted or possible 'stasis' for thought. (I:79)

To which Olson, within three days, had modified to: "right form / is the precise & correct . . . extension of /content under hand." And so it continued, for the next thirty letters, bits and pieces of "Projective Verse" shuttling back and forth between Littleton, New Hampshire and Washington, D.C., surrounded by remarks on Dostoievsky, Homer, E.M. Forster, Cocteau, Aaron Burr, Bolyai, Blake and Melville—in short, the variorum of that essay by which Olson gave a generation of poets something to hang on to. Given the richness of this collaboration, it's a good thing Olson never got

that car.

As George Butterick says in his editorial introduction to *The Complete Correspondence*, "(at) times it seems they wrote not to entertain or even instruct, but to survive." The extent to which this is true can be seen by simply looking at the dates when letters were written—sometimes two or three in a day. Neither man had a reading audience at that time, but even more important, neither participated in any literary scene outside that provided by Pound's and Williams' correspondence. At one point Creeley, in desperation, says "(there) is, Olson, singularly, or otherwise: no one but yrself/ anywhere. There are: no examples / no rules/no precedents/no staples/no practisers/that cd break in. (I:96)" With such intense interest, it is no wonder the letters resemble an excited conversation with all of its condensations, abbreviations and wanderings. The style, as a result, is cryptic and heavily encoded—often to the point of unreadability. Here is Olson:

> OK—and you see, we agree, Day/
>
> diminutive.
>
> OKAY. You,
>
> and I, get on. (Want to throw at you, SHE-BEAR.)
>
> NOW, as to MOOD and/or EP m ud and/or EP ode/ a./o/WHO?

or Creeley:

> Well, it is the matters of time (1) and variation (2): that cd interest you. It is not to suggest that a logos (this) can be jumped to a logos (that)—but there are parallels. Many times have thought (tho not without blindness) if, say, if: I cd put down a series of lines, that wd string themselves, like the lines/line: in Bach (back/& back); well/wd be one sweet biz. (I:155)

The tendency at first is to translate, with the help of Butterick's notes at the back, but then again, the rhythms and transitions and abbreviations become interesting in their own right. Such a shorthand reflects the style which Olson had already incorporated into poems like "The Kingfishers" and which was to become the mode of *The Maximus Poems*. Equally, Creeley's quick shifts of attention, his heavy use of subordination and short, staccato phrases translate into his calligraphic "bop" style of the fifties.

Both men came to discover the terms for a poetics, feeding and cajoling each other towards complexity of argument. In retrospect, some of their fussing over terms (the poetic line, historical process, education, Lawrence vs. Joyce, etc.) seems a bit rhetorical, but it is only because the terms were so thoroughly discovered here that we can thus look back. And the urgency with which they found an alternative language, one *not* inherited from New Critical methods, is bracing to witness.

Their common origin in Pound and Williams serves as a testing point for virtues and limitations of the previous generation. For Olson, Pound is problematic, to say the least. The letters which chronicle the elder poet's erratic behavior while at St. Elizabeth's are among the most interesting—particularly vivid since Olson is at odds with him and Creeley is often the intermediary recipient of Pound's mutterings:

> Believe Olson FUNDAMENTALLY (not superficially) wrong. tendency which will sterilize anything it touches. i.e., AGAINST nature's increase. But Cr/must judge for himself. shall try not to return to subject. Merely telling Creel to WATCH the effect of certain bottom ideas; wot comes FROM certain seed; . . . (I:98)

This warning is directed at, among other things, Olson's supposed Jewish ancestry (readers familiar with Pound's anti-semitism will recognize his equation of "sterilize anything it touches" with Jews and usury). But however charged their personal relations, the "Path of Ezra" dominates Olson's concerns, as does the importance of Williams or Crane serve a similar function for Creeley.

Creeley's letters (they outnumber Olson's three to one) reflect his serious interest in jazz as a source for a new line, a fact which he discusses in subsequent interviews but which here is given specific contours. Where Olson's letters project a vocalic poetry based on voice and body, Creeley's evidence a sense of breath taken from Charlie Parker, Miles Davis and Bud Powell. In them, he finds essential verification for his own phrasal and rhythmic patterning, his use of enjambment and his dependence on short, stanzaic groups. But no less important for our sense of his poetry are those more casual comments on speech patterns and conversation which occur in more autobiographical passages: ". . .the way I speak: is, or has to do with, that slowness & slow laps, say, around a center. That is: talk, god yes: for hours, days even: on one thing. . ."

The subjects covered in these first two volumes range all over the map: theories of history, Hart Crane's language, little magazines (*Golden Goose, The Lititz Review, Origin*), Frank Moore, jazz, French poetry, mathematics, pigeon raising, Vincent Ferrini—and of course "The Doctor" (Williams) and EP. Many of the letters concern publication of poems in various magazines, Creeley serving as go-between for numerous small press publishers. But the dominant fact of these early letters is the growth and evolution of "Projective Verse" which, as I have said, was hammered out continuously from their earliest communication. Finally, the letters serve as a virtual compendium of source materials for Olson's poetry, annotating difficult passages and providing some of the context behind his more condensed remarks (Butterick has collected most of these annotations into his important *Guide to the Maximus Poems*).

The editor has maintained the stylistic particularities of each letter (spacing, spelling, punctuation) and has kept all of his "apparatus" at the rear of the volume. Extensive footnotes are provided for all proper names, works cited and dates. There is an index of poems referred to by the poets and another index for proper names. Such thoroughness is characteristic of Butterick's work, and with letters as complex and multi-referential as these, the editor's function is all the more important. Now if this kind of documentary and scholarly attention could only be devoted to the great Moderns!

There are attendant problems with the letters, though not with the volumes themselves. The decision to publish *all* of the letters rather than a selection, is the right one, but the decision to publish them in numerous small volumes (ten to twelve) makes for an expensive purchase—and there would be little reason to read only one or two. Given the size of other Black Sparrow volumes, it would seem that fewer, larger volumes would have allowed more readers to gain access to this vital work. The more poignant problem concerns the proliferation of secondary sources on Olson at a time when virtually all of his primary works are out of print. A proposed university press edition of *The Maximus Poems* is a long way off, and so these letters, so rich in their development of Olson's major work, exist in an odd literary historical vacuum. But there is no faulting the letters themselves—as exciting a document as the poems themselves—and one is, once again, grateful to George Butterick for his careful editing and scholarship. △

Pacific Plainsong I-XIII. PETER MICHELSON.
Brillig Works, 1978.

by DONALD WESLING

The composition of *Pacific Plainsongs* began in the sixties and has stretched to the late seventies. The book consists of thirteen odelike declamations, each coordinated with an old sepia photograph of American Indians shown either in their burial trees or in some gesture of being co-opted or dominated by white men. Peter Michelson is dealing with Western Indians from the Apaches in the south to the tribes of the Northwest and the Great Plains. A good deal of travel and study seems to've been involved, but this is not an anthopologist's version. The book affiliates with the sixties and seventies tribalism of Gary Snyder and Edward Dorn, especially with Dorn's *Shoshoneans* (prose) and *Recollections of Gran Apacheria* (poems), in its admiration for the way the Indian was wired to the earth, in its clear and sad elaboration of the ways the Indian has been changed by being dominated. The saddest thing is that Indians have been partly assimilated to another culture and world-view, and so have neither the magnificent certainties they knew nor the finesse or inclination to make a rational-bureaucratic civilization work for them. So the plainsongs are elegies, often breaking out into anger against the White American Speaker and his earlier representatives in the Corps of Discovery, people (in some ways admirable, in other ways abominations) like H.H. Bancroft, Kit Carson, Lewis & Clark. The book has perhaps too much noble rant either on behalf of the Indians or attacking their oppressors: the patent ironies of "Fourth of July Oration" are evident after two or three pages, but the speech goes on for more than nine pages. (The Indian-like chant in the last song, "we were bad men," seems to me more effective: a development of the book's staple voice, and a sensible closure.) To my ear and eye, Michelson nearly always justifies his chosen measure in the uneven-length lines that do not come up against the left margin: these make up about nine-tenths of the book. The problems, such as they are, are not of prosody but of attitude: polemic overstatement of his splendid cause. △

My Pleasure. LAURA CHESTER.
The Figures, 1980.

by DONALD WESLING

Dear Laura Chester:

I went to your Reading at UC San Diego, February 1981, and tracked you with my review-copy as you read. Since that was something like a personal encounter and you are no longer a book-commodity to me, I will frame this attacking review as a letter. You read with verve in a fine direct voice, and I know that many at that Reading liked you and your work. My own opposition to your writing is based on principles. The first principle is that the work of a published professional poet, whether or not she is the publisher of her own work (as you are), has to justify all its chosen measures. Whatever kind of line there is must have energy, eventfulness; and whole sections, too, must justify themselves in their position by choice of forms appropriate to sense. I can see no compelling reason why one technique (prose paragraphs, say, rather than Williams-like tiers stepping down the page) is used in any one place, or why any large swatch of lines in the middle of a poem is there rather than not there. ("The dog the cat the bird & the kid," a 10-page poem, would be my example here; or "Gate's Waiting," with its purely-assertive ending to a long poem.) The second principle is in opposition to your own prefatory statement that "the toys we can't break are the voices that people us," for I would hold that some voices are more privileged than others, and that your veering from mock baby-talk to common English swearwords, your delectation of flotsam thrown up on the shore of the unconscious, does very much the opposite of (your phrase for what you like) "holding the leash." The third and last principle, and the most central to my mind, is that any professional poet needs at least one idea. Some people have lots of ideas: that gives them even larger claims. But acting out and delivering over the contents of the mind isn't enough for a man's poetry so it shouldn't be enough for a woman's poetry, either, though I suppose I here call down the wrath of certain programmatic feminists with whose notions I otherwise agree. A poetry can make claims only if it shows in some way that history exists in and through domesticity, that the poet has done some reading in and also beyond his or her craft, that the mind's thoughts are as

significant as its images and personal voices. This vigor of prosody and of intellect I will call wit, and wit is the quality notably lacking in *My Pleasure.* As Samuel Johnson argued in his *Life of Cowley*, wit is strenuous thinking. Or, to vary the allusion by referring to what Keats said to Shelley in a letter (have you read Keats? impossible to know who you've read on the showing of this book? is poetry or is it not the scholar's art?), the prescription for you, which could also become your pleasure if you could assent, might well be *load every rift with ore.* Yours, Donald Wesling. △

Wind Chrysalid's Rattle. GUSTAF SOBIN.
Montemora Supplement, 1980.

by DENNIS PHILLIPS

There must be some witty remark, somewhere, that warns a poet of the dangers of writing about The Universe. If there is such a maxim, it must be suspended in order to appreciate the work of Gustaf Sobin found in *Wind Chrysalid's Rattle*. The suspense will be worthwhile. Although Sobin isn't always successful in his evocations of The Universe (and a sidereal array of other Big Images), the risks taken to deal with his poetic landscape in terms of such magnitude fill his work with a compelling otherworldiness.

Form, and forms, are central to the workings of *Wind Chrysalid's Rattle*. The book is divided into two sections. The first lends its title to the whole book, and is dated 1973. The second, titled "Mirrorhead," is dated 1975. Throughout both sections poems appear in two predominant forms. One is widely leaded, longlined, and is either didactic or aphoristic (or both). One is shortlined, concentrated and often takes the generic title Helix.

The Didactic/Aphoristic (D/A) and the Helix forms provide the two main trajectories of the book. And, depending on which of the two forms is used, the book falls prey to, or overcomes the Witty Maxim About The Universe.

Let's begin with the problematic poems. The D/A poems are more reminiscent of Blake then of Nietzsche in their use of precepts, and unique in their free-association-on-a-theme style of development, a kind of regulated automatic writing.

Sound, the progenitor, by continuing to ring through its creation, its forms,
begets Speech.

Speech, both the resonance and celebration of Sound.

Speech, that's never pronounced, but *cast, diffused, exuded.*

That communicates with nothing except its own ebullience.

That varies with the depth and contour, the vibratory shell of each form.

(from *Notes on Sound, Speech, Speech-Crystals and the Celestial Echo*)

The development from line to line of the sound/speech idea is an interesting way of cultivating a progression of language, almost like a jazz progression. But the declarations that constitute the progression seem simplistic, and so the elaborated mechanism of development is disporportionate to what it conveys. As in the above cited excerpt, and many other D/A poems, the poet as teacher seems to be leaving his readers with the general residue of some cosmic thought process which, at best, achieves escape velocity from the simplistic, hurtling to the autistic. (What the hell are Speech-Crystals?).

Simplistic: "For the archer, only the interval is sacred." "It's the beloved, within us, that becomes the poem." "It's by what we didn't see that we'll recognise ourselves." "The force flowing against us is also ours." (We are uncomfortably close to the territory of Mr. Khalil Gibran.)

And autistic:

That genesis is a wind.

The rock ripples; the night swims.

That the eyes are forever swifter than their green mirrors.

Or:

That our lust is lightness. Acceleration.

And what we call the 'stillness' is the inconceivable velocity of our flesh,
thinking in the same space-cadence as the universe.

The thrust of a single whisper.

The lymph, the lightning!

Or:

Blossoming generatrix, and genius of our every breath.

(all from "That the Universe is Chrysalid")

(These declarations are lacking the information to give them substance.)

It's noteworthy that, by the end of the book, the D/A poems begin to find their own ground. The poem "Hold the Flowing Polyphonous," for example, is far more vital in its use of the precept line.

The poems called Helix, and the poems which formally look like them, succeed where the others don't. It is through the Helices that Sobin's entire book is visible, where the fabric of a world he presents is seen as if through the vertical embrasures of a battlement. And with the reverberations of *Helix* (the primal spiral shape, the shape of galaxies—even our own, the shape of human DNA molecules), the theme of the Chrysalid (of nascence, emergence, secrets locked in forms) is explored and embellished. Moreover, these poems, in their brevity, describe their ground. The declarations of the D/A poems, in lacking information, are lacking the kind of grounding that the Helices present.

Of the vistas seen through Sobin's spiraling embrasures, some are imagistic, some linguistic. And contained in the taut lines of the Helices is a musculature that turns and shifts in response to its own internal tension.

Listen,
the two mirrors
touch.
Rasped
their glowing surfaces sing.

In them
the rivers
and the clotted orchards
bunch.

Skin
springs
but their ground breath beats
against an irreducible light.

The ovals
only
echo.

Milled winds.
Inviolate dust.

Their dense vowels
drain
into night.

(Helix, *Susanna's*)

In some of the other Helices similarly fashioned poems may drag along phrases like "euphoric showers," but this type of terminology is a part of the world we're being shown. And by the end of *Wind Chrysalid's Rattle*, that world, however fragmented the view, has dropped roots, or sent spores, leaving parts of the parent world in the mind of the reader.

Within the fabric of the book, Sobin uses certain leitmotifs which reappear but don't develop. The fact that the motifs don't develop gives to the book an almost kabbalistic atmosphere. For example, "the other" is mentioned over and over again, and yet it is never specified. It seems to take on the character of "the name" (more overtly kabbalistic) towards the book's end. If one can suspend one's curiosity and impatience, though, the confusion embodied in these unexplained points in the text is gradually dealt with. The strong poem "Chaplade: Autumn" is more definitive.

Comes back
with each small, stuttered particle
still whirring. goes out, comes back,
is in the same instant: another;

while wanting to live;
while wanting a name to live in.

What happens in the last poems in the book is a merging of themes from the D/A poems with the tight delivery and illustrative style of the Helix poems. "Breath's Reflection," the book's final poem, is too long to reprint in its entirety here. It, however, is a fine example of the synthesis of the declarative and the illustrative. This is the last segment of "Breath's Reflection":

wanting to say
wanting to say the eyes
    in which the eyes would, at last, resound,
    and in each limb,
                reflect;
(where
    projection, in its lost orchard, replies).

who are you,
who are you who's breathing through me?
    whose hair braids itself in my breath?
who still wordless
is waiting in shimmers
    for your name to name me,
and wrap yourself,
a new creature, in the flesh of your mirrors.

Reading *Wind Chrysalid's Rattle* is watching the poems overcome their problems, merging and intertwining, gaining the strength of the poems that succeed, and, for the most part, shedding the groundless declarations of the poems that don't succeed. As with a chrysalid, we see its grossness differently once we see what it yields.

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A word should also be said about Eliot Weinberger, publisher of *Montemora.* He has expanded the usual notion of a poetry magazine with the publication of Montemora Supplements. By publishing books, Weinberger presents an extended selection of a single poet's work, with the space, arrangement and length that even the most conscientious journals can rarely afford. Hopefully there will be other engaging supplements to follow. △

The Prose of Fact. MICHAEL DAVIDSON.
The Figures, Berkeley 1981.

by THOMAS MEYER

> *Experience, already reduced to a group of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without.*
>
> —WALTER PATER

I think of Matisse. *Chambrée*, pertaining to a room. Chambered? Not quite. In English, immediately, one imagines wine brought upstairs from the cellar, set on a sideboard so that it takes on the room's temperature. No space so intimate as a bedroom, or even so functional. Still I am thinking of somewhere private, safe, a "living" room (that concept for which the French claim they don't have quite the word). A domestic situation, day to day, an ordinary scene of personal absorptions even though *chambrer* means "to room," to share or be confined in a room, closer to our verb "billet." What occurs to me is that quality in Matisse, implicit both in palette and perspective, of experience as it comes in *here* from out *there*. The prosaic as drawn into consideration by a curious, outgoing mentality is as descriptive of William Carlos Williams as it is of Henri Matisse.

As it would not be quite apt for Richard Diebenkorn's *Ocean Park* series, or Michael Davidson and *The Prose of Fact*. For Davidson and Diebenkorn there are complications, psychic hesitancies that provide a proscenium—an intermediary stage between the orchestra and the background or backdrop—tempering the outward curiosity of eye or speech. The thick walls of personality provide Williams, provide Matisse with thick skins, a blithe ignoring of the ambiguous. *Ocean Park* No. 112 covers *The Prose of Fact*, covers I am tempted to think as in "protects," "shades," or *protégé*. Diebenkorn in this recent series of paintings is the direct heir of early Matisse, Notre Dame, Quai St. Michel. The luminosity and spatial tonalities, the architectural element, the insistent concern with surfaces, all

result in a highly spiritual presentiment. Such a spirituality, in that it stands beyond natural cause and effect, clearly verges upon pure, impersonal aspects of a conjectured psychic "structure." Flip to the last page or two of the book, there in an appealing photograph taken by Lin Jakary, Michael Davidson. Handsome, sunny, his broad, evident muscularity sweetened by the attitude of his hands as they stroke and rub an obviously purring cat laid out on the desk before him, between us and him. Books, papers, a wall tacked with postcards, snapshots it looks like, and a window, the panes of which cut the black and white blotches (a tree, a shrub) into luminous rectangles. There is a marvelous feel of light in the room, the same as causes the Diebenkorn on the cover to glow. *Du beau sejour du commun jour* Ronsard proclaimed this honeyed ambience.

Just so, Carlos Williams belongs to *The Prose of Fact*, but where the good doctor's approach was direct, Davidson's is open. There it is in his photographic countenance, an openness that gives him vulnerability. Since we see a poet here, that sweetness is a sensitivity to language in its uncertainties, its ambivalence and drawing back from experience. This isn't quite the case in Williams, even the late Williams. Although there was his aphasia, the coming again to speech, it was plain speech, the *vraie vérité* of language for him was that it become a commission of simplicity. Not so for Davidson, unless as heir he inherits along with his generation that aphasia, that slurring and interruption of speech, which is quite possible. And which, in fact, might slur experience itself, even before it approaches the verbal. A certain might in *A Prose of Fact* is its entertainment of language as pure experience and the attendant suggestion that, say, speech disorders may be perceptual disorders; i.e., we stutter because reality stutters. "The disturbance in speaking which is manifested in a slip of the tongue can in the first place be caused by the influence of another component of the same speech—by an anticipatory sound, that is, or by a perseveration—or by another formulation of the ideas contained within the sentence or context that it is one's intention to utter," Freud notes in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, the fifth chapter, "Slips of Tongue"; indeed, a handbook of composition in an "open field," "by the musical phrase," tracking the "passional." What we have yet to say, even that which remains obscured by attention and intention, can disorder what we are presently saying, just as what we have yet to experience may be directed by as yet unexperienced, but perhaps an-

ticipated, perceptions. On page 59 of *The Prose of Fact*, in an etude headed with an epigram from Maurice Blanchot, this apposite passage appears, carrying us from one side of Freudian slips to the other:

> He imagines a vantage something like the one before him only more full, more elaborated. He thinks back to a moment in which, unable to sleep, he comes downstairs to sit at the table and itemize all of the reasons for insomnia. The list is filled with the day's events, all of which seem inconsequential until tied to analogous events the next day. The phonecall that he failed to make today would lead to his making the same call tomorrow; the cheese bought today would be put into the dinner the following evening; the shirt, picked up at the cleaners, could thence be worn. And so forth. All thoughts were retrospective. For each moment of awareness there would be an equivalent series of awarenesses projected into the future which would validate, complete, fulfill those already encountered.

Despite the tenses, the same dynamic pertains here, making the future a disturbance of the present.

The situation? "A temporal field in which each moment is potentially revelatory" (I've lifted this Nietzschean phrase from Davidson's essay on Robert Creeley's prose, "The Presence of the Present," *Boundary 2*): *Le beau sejour du common jour.* Walter Pater calls it "this fair abode of our common daylight" in his discussion of Joachim du Bellay, back to whom he looks for the complexion of "modern" (1873) poets in whose work like that of the *Plëiade* "it is necessary that there should be perceptible . . . something individual, inventive, unique, the impress there of the writer's own temper and personality." This impress because of when and where it takes shape molds a *poësie intime*, "that intensely modern sort of poetry (Pater again) in which the writer has for his aim the portraiture of his own intimate moods, and to take the reader into his confidence." I don't want to suggest Davidson and Pater signify the same thing. No. Though I do want to hint that Davidson's language yields a *richesse* of distinctions in direct succession to Pater's formulation. For instance, "The Philosophy of Composition," its opening stanza:

> The palms wave at 4:14
> and again at 4:30

as part of the wallpaper effect
of certain afternoons

In Pater's great essay, "The School of Giorgione," the *fin de siècle* Epicurean maintains, "In its primary aspect, a great picture has no more definite message for us than an accidental play of sunlight and shadow for a few moments on the wall or floor: is itself, in truth, a space of such fallen light, caught as the colors are in an Eastern carpet, but refined upon, and dealt with more subtly and exquisitely than by nature itself." For "picture" I risk reading "poem," content to allow the synesthesia of sunlight dappling a wall to summon as primary a perception in words as it would be in paint. Again, "The Philosophy of Composition,"

the same old anxieties
the point being
you thought the seasons
exerted their "local" effect

when it was *you* all along
and your nervous tic
that gave the air the air
of a Wallace Stevens title

Could it be possible to find a verbal event not analogous but appropriate to an "accidental play of sunlight and shadow" making that "wallpaper effect"; something like a nervous tic, or something more severe like the speech patterns at the end of a manic paroxysm? Or *les fadeurs exquises* of that inner voice each of us hears fading in and out, smearing our thoughts though revealing our idiolects?

He came from the race
that talks incessantly
in order to explain everything
that might happen to a person
who remained silent long enough
to listen, in the interval
they supplied a translator
because where he comes from
they don't speak the same

as I do

Untitled, page 46: like Giorgione's subjects, Davidson is continually listening "to detect the smallest interval of musical sound, the smallest undulation in the air, or feeling for music in thought on a stringless instrument, ear and finger refining themselves infinitely, in the appetite for sweet sound; a momentary touch of an instrument in the twilight, as one passes through some unfamiliar room, in a chance company." Even lamenting cruddy vinyl ("Brahms"), "life itself is conceived as a sort of listening—"

> All five of them
> (including Mr. Rubenstein)
> lost forever, their boat
> made out of the same
> lousy plastic.

Wallace Stevens, alongside WCW, is an obvious shade cast in the Elysium of Michael Davidson's work, of course propitiated in the language, but also suggesting in *The Prose of Fact* that here we have a *genre* poetry. "Genre" as in genre painting, scenes and subjects from common, everyday life (versus, I suppose, "poetic fancy"), and as genre Davidson's poems are *Giorgionesque*, "they belong to a sort of poetry which tells itself without an articulated story."

"The News" is the longest poem in this volume (six pages) and comes about a third of the way through. Its final two lines ("or the interruption / by the phone in Xanadu") sum up that genre quality I called earlier *chambrée*, as though the evening news were a video phantom from Porlock; that Xanadu and the poet's private chambers were interpenetrations. Fancy gives way to genre. It still maintains a Romantic buzz but does not "dress-up" or "act itself out." Fact, the so-called news, public or personal, comes into such a room, into view the way a landscape may be said to enter a room when the curtains are drawn. The poem's nine irregular sections whisper of loss, a break in domestic circumstance—"she" is no longer there where "he" is: *il et elle ne sont pas chambrés*, in other words. (Or *chambrées*? Gee, I wonder; in order to maintain the distinction between a chambered gun or nautilus, and confinement?) The "seeming" quality of this news, the indirection of its semantic statement imbedded in crisp syntax, is black to the dazzling white of "Home Thoughts from Abroad."

while the weather cools a piano plays
with difficulty
as in living alone only sleep is difficult,
the sun sets every day at an earlier hour
each address to be placed at the top
of a letter with three paragraphs
greeting and close
yet when she was here
all of this was left silent

Compare the above to the opening stanza of "Home Thoughts from Abroad" (I caution a post-Rimbaud attitude toward all pronouns, all biography should be considered a floundering Titan)

Your being here was wonderful,
everything has changed,
we look out upon the hedge and lawn mower
for the first time,
the light is grey, now green,
now grey again;
see what you have accomplished
and from what heights
until the sheer necessity for writing this
has vanished

or taken on a different name

From "Home Thoughts" on, the second half roughly, this taking on a different name lifts *The Prose of Fact* on wings of a soaring cathexis effected in the language, independent of obvious subject matter. A buoyancy invades the text, defying the overdetermined character of earlier poems (and of an earlier book, *The Mutabilities*), placing side by side such ironic tesserae as "comradeship and millenial despair." That doublet occurs in "Interior with Michael," a shining example of this effect I'm trying to describe, toward which *The Prose of Fact* veers. Pronouns in general are now felt to be definite conditions of address, separate yet structural throughout. Rather like what goes on in Diebenkorn's *Ocean Park*, worked and reworked patches, *pentimenti* are abutted to form linear, clear, open statements of closure. Despite the return to previous concerns, the surface retains its freshness, no *sfumato*. Nothing ever muddies despite the constant stirring

up of still depths.

In conclusion, I want to recommend Michael Davidson's statement, "What is being language-centered?" in *The Difficulties* (first issue), Viscerally Press, 118 Crain Avenue, Kent, Ohio 44240. It's been my blithe assumption writing this review that its reader will at least recognize Michael Davidson's name, and that he'll have reasonably easy access to a copy of *The Prose of Fact*, consequently I've given my enthusiasm wide range. I've neglected the humor in his work, an extremely important (much commented upon) aspect, but so singular that it nearly defies all but obvious remarks, at least whizzing through with the zesto that's been mine. And I'd caution several readings of his work, of this book as set forth in the ordering of its poems. There is an elegant procession of motives (pastel colors, green, recorded music, the cat, certain objects like the tone arm of his turntable); to discern its traces is to apprehend not so much a shape, but the negotiation of shapeliness. Michael Davidson's poetry draws us through the disturbed edges of emotion into the passionate center of undenied, never disregarded intimacies. In part, that's why Walter Pater and *The Renaissance* (Donald Hill's splendid edition) come into the court: "Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end." △

Tiresias I:9:B: Great Slave Lake Suite. LELAND HICKMAN. Momentum Press, 1980;

by MARTIN NAKELL

The wars of this poem are mirrored by the war between horror and lyricism, and the combatants are secretly in love with one another. Immediately there is an exhilaration to the poem that derives from it language, which is inventive, driving, compellingly beautiful. The horror is specific: alienation, guilt, the failed attempt to love. Hickman weaves these elements into a cloth whose astringent beauty is overwhelming. It is not an easy task, but there is an urgency in the very breath of the language to achieve release. He is digging relentlessly, and that effort itself stirs the deepest parts of us.

Aside from the fact that there is an actual Great Slave Lake, in Canada,

and this long poem begins with an actual journey to that lake, we are moved to ask ourselves, why this lake? What enslavement? Firstly, it unfolds, that Hickman himself is the slave, and the Lake is the water of connection: knowledge, or self-knowledge. "great slave lake/sang me go down & go down, stand still in my thunder & hear it". This self-knowledge doesn't come easily, but if it is to be achieved at all one must enslave oneself to the task. And the Lake is the swirl and steam of Hickman's own emotions unresolved, it is what still enslaves him. And the Lake itself is slave, as all things are, bound by their own order. In all three of these interpretations lies the same basic truth: to yield to the enslavement is to approach freedom.

In the second section of the poem, "Paint Child At Pain At Shock At" Hickman portrays a childhood, as the title indicates, of pain. His family is poor, Catholic, and Hickman is a budding homosexual. His father is locked in a brutality which is as blind as it is relentless. The pressures of poverty and lovelessness finally break his mother. Hickman is a child, and among the first things he learns in his lessons is shame from his family, his friends, the parents of his friends. This begins the long epic of alienation. It is told at times in the language of the child, which is the language of magic and repetition, fear and prayer. The repetition becomes a vital staple of Hickman's poetics. In a scene early in this section Hickman is riding in a car with his father and a marine named Louie. He learns what manhood the world would call him to, as Louie "hooks his tough arm out the window"; yet he also learns what he sees all by himself, the beauty that on the marine's arm hung out the window "the wind / mows all the hairs back". Hickman is sitting on Louie-the-marine's lap, low in Louie's lap, where "that bunchup in his levis is a grownup pecker". He tries to imitate the marine, to be manly, "okay leatherneck c'mon let's / both hook our arms out", he can "see (Louie's) tough eyes", but . . . it is a world which evades him as it infects him. The marine reveals Hickman to his father, "well Lee I do declare / your little boy here is tryin' to feel my dingus". And immediately the boy makes of words a prayer, desperately frightened: "o wind mow the hairs back". Then he adds, as if, if he thinks the right thoughts he will be saved: "bad Japs die", though he knows too that somehow *he* is a "bad Jap", the enemy. This story is told in one stanza of 21 lines. It ends, again, with the musical line, at once lyrical and terrified, "wind mow the hairs back & bad Japs die". It is one of the many fine achievements of the poem, both emotionally and

poetically.

In the section entitled "Fort Providence on the Mackenzie River" Hickman intensely portrays a relationship with a woman, Jeanne, in New York City. This is one of the two places in this poem where there is an attempt to establish an ongoing relationship of love. It fails bitterly, partly because of the poet's own past, partly because of Jeanne. One of the most poignant repetitions/chants/prayers of the poem occurs in this section where Hickman writes of Jeanne, "cd shed rage / shd love come". And Hickman prays, "solace from my sky on her mute dumb weird / & absolve her". Again and again he turns those phrases, turning them over like dough until they include himself, ourselves, praying, "& absolve them".

But the figures become confused in the rush toward/away from love. "Brian-Jeanne", Hickman writes, "convolutions of the emblem". Brian is a one-night stand male prostitute picked up in Hollywood. It is a time of fear, disconnection, hope lost and gurgling up, and of the inescapable brutality of childhood. "how will I smoke, drive my car, eat". "pyre / sweet, & lift me as loss and ashes thru my blue sun breath door".

The other place in the poem where Hickman attempts an ongoing relationship of love is with the work itself, with poetry. As everywhere, in love, the childhood appears to haunt, the poem denies him, enslaves him. But the "song shivers", and this shivering is the tremble of possibility. Adept at prayer, Hickman writes, "o hopeful and attentive sentences", wherein he at once is condemned and redeemed. The poem cannot save him any more than anything else his desperation turns to. And yet, in the compression of so much emotion and life into poetry there is a hope that the attention, by its heat alone, will loose the rocks of oppression. And well it may.

The most enduring relationship of the poem is with the father: "& the stern god's ruddy thick phallus plunges into my brain", and "son snuck off to yr queers again?" This anger comes from a more primary place than simply a father's confusion or feeling of betrayal at his son's homosexuality. The anger is deeper than that, for "Dad" is not braying against the son's "queerness" at all, but against his sexuality. The church and the father the same. In reality, it has little to do with *what* the son does sexually, just that he *is* sexual.

Hickman goes on in this section to describe his father after the mother is gone. His father, smoking, "coughs, stub burns small & / soft grey ashes fall

on his white bare toes, dis- / gusted I watch him curl in his head & breathe in slow we swirl / quiet & alone under thick low fog swirl". How beautiful is that last phrase beginning "slow we swirl. . ."! And yet, it is preceded by Hickman watching his father in disgust. How else can he feel towards the man who asked him, "snuck off to yr queers again?", who "plucks at my armpits sideburns eyebrows ass". This whole section, "Fort Providence," ends with the stanza which also closes, for now at least, this probing of the father-son relationship:

> & the dead raven we come upon, on the forest
> floor. sleek once to cleave
> the boreal
> air. twisted neck bent back over wing, great wings
> outspread in great
> struggle. shines
> decaying. ebony beak bloodspeckt,
> wrencht toward sky & eyes
> silver'd. underbelly of
> maggots, ants
> thru crawfeathers stirr'd by the low
> breeze. something
> dead. gleaming like an onyx thru the shadowy
> forest

Passages of this brilliance are not uncommon. However, the poem is too long for the narrow focus of its obsession. The scope of the poem encompasses things large and significant. The poem itself, and Hickman's handling of a basically narrative and biographical work, is significant. But the story repeats itself endlessly: sex and the choking pain of guilt. Horror horror horror until, at times, the horror loses context and therefore meaning. These things are important. They are the crux of our lives, but overworked they become tedious and expected, and their impact (which, with Hickman's intensity, control, language and sense of both bitterness and compassion, is substantial) is diminished. It is important to follow obsessions. It is equally important to broaden and see further. This book, long as it is, is only part of yet a larger work, *Tiresias*, and the unfolding of that work over the years will be the opportunity for us to participate in that broadening.

The craft and intelligence which Hickman wields in forming this vivid work makes the publication of this book a vital event for poetry in America.

What continues to amaze me in this poem is the humanness of it, the tenderness Hickman has maintained and raises here, raising us with it. When the authentic sensuality comes through this poem it washes clear through you. Neruda said of Rimbaud that things got so bad for him he kicked beauty off his knee. Hickman has entered the same difficult territories yet has not lost in the crossing his sense of beauty, of reaching into things and touching them at their core. △

Cap of Darkness. DIANE WAKOSKI.
Black Sparrow Press, 1980.

by DAVID R. SMITH

Cap of Darkness, Diane Wakoski's most recent book of poems, provides a near perfect illustration of the ways in which our qualities are also our faults. For example, given her belief that one finds the stuff of poetry in patterns of recurrence, it follows that much of her best work will rise out of these repetitions or, as she also calls them, "re-visions." It also follows that they represent a danger for her; for that past repeated, that obsessiveness, can equally produce not only visions of collapsed time, of a past resurgent in the present, but, as well, clutter. In *Cap* she insists upon this ever-presence: "some rehearsal of the past is always with me;" and much of the book seems devoted to proving the assertion, sometimes to great effect, sometimes less grandly. It is a collection with its share of both taints and honors.

There are a number of first-rate pieces here: "In Praise of Modern Time," "Red Runner," "Red Runner, Again," "Not Breaking the Silence," "Trophies," "My Mother's Milkman," "Lantana," amongst others. And there are a few she might have meditated longer. The difficulty for the reader is that the weaker works may hide the virtues of the rest. The problem is not the reader's alone, for that unevenness is on her mind these days. In her Preface to *Toward A New Poetry*,* a collection of her criticism published at about the same time as *Cap*, she argues against publishing a selection of her best work by insisting that she wants to be read whole, seen entire, and that her "work is a kind of organic entity containing great weaknesses which

* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980).

balance great strengths." The statement, which is both courageous and curious and which engenders more questions than we can ponder here, may reflect not only self-criticism but an uneasy awareness of some critical reactions to her work—that it is unstructured, prolix, prosaic, even unpoetic, too repetitive. Some of the criticism is silly, for the best of her work is obviously bedded in patterns of image and metaphor, of repetitions and variations on them. Her response to the criticism is a kind of ambivalent attraction. She confronts it by repeating the supposed sin, a version of Dancing on the Grave of a Son of a Bitch. But it is a dangerous game, candle and moth.

A few years ago her publisher, John Martin, urged her to "go on to something new," and she responded with a poem, "George Washington Meets the King of Spain (on the Magellanic Clouds)"* (even the title is a defiance), which reveals both her love of confrontation and the razor's edge she has chosen to walk. She accuses her interlocutor in the poem of

> Not understanding
> that the new
> is the old
> viewed
> and reviewed,
> viewed over and over:

And to make sure no one misses her point, she follows that colon with a short parade of figures from her mythic pantheon. Here in *Cap of Darkness* she accuses herself of rambling in her repetitions and then proceeds to do so in order to illustrate, I presume, (a) that form is an extension of content, which is an extension of a life composed of will and memory and disordered by "otherness," and (b) that the critics are wrong. She admits that she is uneconomical with words in "A Californian Fights against the Old New England Traditions," which she dedicates to Stanley Kunitz, who is more sparing. She compares their differences with nice objectivity, using a visit to a supermarket as a metaphor. He, a spare, older man, chooses Edwards Brothers coffee, the least expensive; she wants all of Araby, South America, and Fortnum and Masons. But if she is profligate, she is so, she says, because she seeks size. Nonetheless, if only in their recurrence, these confrontations belie an underlying uneasiness and ambivalence. She half recognizes cross purposes in her work, is overwhelmed by the blindness of her critics, and is exasperatedly unsure of what to do.

---

* In *Looking for the King of Spain* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1975).

To the degree that a collection of poems is *about* any one thing, *Cap of Darkness* is about change, about aging and accepting limitations. Yet she opens it with a "Preface" of six poems centered on the King of Spain, a fantasy figure who has been a fixture in her work for three-quarters of a decade and who represents for the "Diane" of the poems an ideal and unchanging world. This "Preface" is designed to stand in contrast to what follows; but the point is too well made, particularly as he and others of her young mythic figures keep reappearing in the rest of the collection, as though she were passing them in review:

> This explanation is addressed to:
> The King of Spain
> My Motorcycle Betrayer
> The Woodsman
> The Astronomer
> A Poet
> A Truck Driver
> A Mountain Climber

Further, the collection is full of the confusions and protestations about love and its loss, about her failure to be beautiful that her readers have come to expect: "but you are gone now." "He's gone. / He's gone. / I am old." "How do we know / what love means?" One understands that she is trying to create a web of associations and a consistency of persona; but this reappearing past is seen through a "Diane" who seems to be caught in a revolving door with an incubus. She treads a razor's edge between enough and too much; and repetitions such as these sometimes seem automatic, reflexively self-reflexive.

She plagiarizes herself in "Dear Michael," writing, "Nothing is simple or innocent anymore," a phrase she had already used in "Virtuoso Literature for Two and Four Hands" five years earlier. In "A Dissertation on Smallness" she writes:

> Looking for the King of Spain while reading Lorca,
> Stevens, and Yeats,
> and dreaming of Rilke's mustache.

Not only is Rilke's mustache everywhere, but these lines are taken virtually entire from *The Man Who Shook Hands.*

There are also occasional (perhaps I should say "other") evidences of inat-

tention, signs of first draftyness. Here are three examples, each of a different order. In "Cap of Darkness" she writes:

> No, my battle is with
> the ghosts themselves who have positioned
> the false singers in their ancestral houses and given them
> position. . . . .

She declares a woman witty who said, "The size of dress you wear depends on your wealth. If you buy a $100 dress, you may take only a size seven. But if you buy a $15 dress, you may require a twelve." In "Not Breaking the Silence," an otherwise fine poem, she walls Poe's hero "behind bottles of sherry."

These noddings do not help our confidence as readers, not even despite the insistence of her voice, and she wants to have her say:

> You are right, Judy,
> no one wants to hear.
> But I want to speak.
> I want you to listen.

This spirit of insistence is both a bravery and, at times, a foolishness because it can lead to contentious distraction. Several poems become involved in argumentative outbursts which lie outside their substance, as though in the course of writing a poem she is reminded of an argument anterior to it but which she will at that point, part way though the poem, finish.

Contrasting two poems in this collection is instructive. Each is generated by a recollection from childhood. Each touches on failures of the self; but as poems, one is unfortunate, the other blessed. One is filled with blame, anger, self-justification which tear at its fabric, the other with generous self-acceptance, which helps keep it whole.

In "Washing & Ironing" Wakoski recalls that her mother, a bookkeeper, took in washing to help pay the rent. The child hated the situation, not because the mother was humiliated, but because she, "locked into [her] helpless / child-like life," was:

> And I am angry,
> and say I will never learn to keep
> accurate
> records,

never type,
and never iron clothes
when I am adult.

This image of childish petulance derives from what "Diane" takes to be her mother's failure. But on other mornings, every bit as self-centered as when angry, the child awakens

to see morning glories in the window
and to see the early morning sunshine coming
in the door, hearing
the morning doves making their throaty noises
and my mother standing in our small living room
ironing. . . .

On such luxuriant occasions, when she smells the "hot wet cotton" and looks forward to a "whole fresh summer day," it turns out that her mother is ironing for *her*, ironing *her* sundresses.

The problem this poem suffers from is not the child's lack of generosity but, rather, from the poet's need to defend attitudes which rise out of that past. Instead of allowing these recollections their own time and place, Wakoski elaborates and explains; and it is by this avenue that her angry polemic enters the poem and at this point that we suspect the existence of an unnamed opponent who once objected to that lack of generosity and who is being countered by an increasingly extravagant argument. She describes how a seven-year-old boy murdered an eight-year-old who had taunted him for doing woman's work by hanging out the wash. That murder, she writes:

seemed
hideously
in keeping
with my feelings about that awful anachronism:
the deliberate refusal to own an electric dryer
(or to use it, if one owned one),
and the clinging to that hideous practice,
hanging the washing out
on a clothesline.

The parenthetical is awkward, and it is also disturbing in the way it attempts to shut down all objections. It becomes a kind of last word, stairwell wit.

The stress shows in the Barthelmetic extravagance of language, the "deliberate refusal" becoming an "awful anachronism" which forces one to the "hideous practice" of hanging out the wash. She, however, has put all that behind her:

> Oh, how glad I am to sit with my book or pen and paper
> at the laundromat,
> while the warm air gushes around the fabrics,
> rotating them smooth, airing them,
> drying them warm and supple.

The machine is no longer in the garden. She has invited it indoors and raised its use to the level of civilized custom:

> How I embrace the 20th century and its technology,
> freeing me from centuries of drudgery,
> . . . . . .
> and we *do* have a choice now.
> We can leave savage customs behind.

From our laundromat we can contemplate man's accomplishments and rejoice in God's ways.

Contrast this to "Lantana." It is the last in a series of pieces which works toward it and which permits her to digress and return, to digress again—without rambling, for the parts retain their evident structures and form a whole as increasingly familiar images weave their way through these texts. The series opens with a prose "Letter from Unwritten *Greed, Part 10*" in which she recounts her fright at being awakened in the still of the night by a moth beating against her window. By association the moth becomes not only the frightener but the frightened, both predator and prey: "He is beautiful, and I think there is a certain madness in my marauder turning out to be a butterfly—for, if I had to choose two symbols for myself, one would be the moon and the other would be a butterfly." She completes the circularity and the meaning of the image by recalling that as a child she could stand still for hours, "abnormally still for a child of five, in front of a hedge of lantana and catch butterflies in my bare fingers, something no child should have been able to do." This conceptual base is then built upon in "The Moth," a poem in which that insect becomes a metaphor for those who are trapped, and then in "I Dream of My Failures with Ed Dorn as Judge," in which her fears are expressed by silence, "Wherever lantana grows." With

the way prepared for these intertwining images of the ambivalent moth/butterfly and lantana, of destruction and silence, she then turns to "Lantana."

> How still can a child be? I know
> now that children move and talk and
> in fact are like fire and water
> far more than adults.
> But my own childhood was spent
> as a ghost, whose words
> came out thin, misty and almost silently.
> I sat quietly,
> so quietly that adults often forgot
> I was there, and cut paper dolls
> or read my book
> but always listened,
> and waited,
> listened
> with murdering stillness.
>
> A long hedge of lavender flowerets,
> the lantana with its dusty, slightly bitter
> smell, the little dark berries forming
> after the flowers, like the beady eyes of birds,
> and the flowers themselves
> like tiny cushions of bouquet.
> How the Monarchs, Swallowtails and Cabbage Moths
> loved this hedge, and the smaller greying moths with brown eyes
> in their peasant wings; they would sit with blades moving
> back and forth for balance, fanning,
> almost underwater motions, their black scrolled etchings
> calligraphing the whole yardfront hedge,
> and I, age five, hypnotized by the orange and yellow
> stained glass, fragile with powder,
> would stand quietly
> quietly, until the insects forgot
> I was there; I stood still
> looking, listening for whatever there was to hear,
> the humming of the hedge, the hot afternoon buzzing
> and cracking, my hands poised, thick little girl hands
> but still,

still as stone,
more still than a child's hands could be
till the butterflies dazed with the quiet day and the heat
relaxed their fanning wings
then I slowly moved and would capture one, pinched between my small thick fingers, and take it home, a prize
for a glass jar.

How did I do this? My hands that have shaken since adolescence
with nervous energy and mercurial power?
Yet, I still can sit for hours, without fidgeting.

Unnatural, though, that I in my little black high-topped shoes
with yellow braids pinned on top of my head that bees like to sit on
should have started with this stillness.

Because of it
I was able to murder butterflies.
I didn't want them in glass jars, only wanted to
catch them. Didn't want to kill them / only wanted to prove I could catch them.
Pity me
in my little black shoes,
not knowing what to do
for love,
or beauty,
and that my murdering stillness was
all
I had to offer.

Here is no argument, no blame, no anger. She neither explains nor answers. There is no unheard charge. She recreates a moment, gives it space and time. It is, as Montaigne said, a kind of perfection "de savoir jouir loyalement de son être." To enjoy loyally, to rejoice in one's own being requires this objective sense of what one is or was; and it is that acceptance of or loyalty to self that this poem gives us. And it gives us more, for the prosody is sure, line lengths just. The repetitions serve to hold it all together. They are never a distraction. They are, indeed, brilliant. This free verse has its own rhythms which also help secure the structure. Form *is* an extension of content, as she herself is convinced. Such a poem and the others I have mentioned outweigh the dross, and by a good bit. △

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